

The Problem of Misrecognition in Jane Austen's Novels

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to present a dialectical framework within which to re-read Jane Austen's novels and to counter the critical dichotomy between a 'conservative' Jane (proposed by the containment school of critics) and a 'radical' Austen (proposed by the subversive school of critics). It aims at providing a framework that is flexible enough to explain why the two schools are inadequate, but rigorous enough to shed new light on Austen's complex vision of epistemological enlightenment—namely, her insistence on the 'positive recognition', the 'negative cognition', and the 'cynical misrecognition' as essential moments in the development of the subject.

My term positive recognition refers to the valorisation of rational recognition that Austen's novels share with Hegel's philosophy. As the naïve subject, the romantic lady, the master, the servant, the moral hypocrite and the conscientious individual shift to construct new subject-positions, Austen's *Bildungsroman* echoes the Hegelian notion of *Bildung* to highlight not only the possibility of education, but the formation of new values. Eventually, the Austenian subjects recognize their mistakes, assimilate the content of their society and reconcile with the world.

However, Austen goes beyond Hegel's optimism to see that unity is impossible. Her 'negative cognition' is likened to Lacan's response to Hegel: the subject's innate Otherness can only heighten its disunity and foreground the subject's state of permanent 'lack' in the center. In her early stories, the subject is invited to re-cognize its disunity—how language and the Other intrude into the subject's world and become the source of its 'Self'. In her later novels, Austen features the lack of harmony in the social scene and in the subject's mindscape. The subject fails to enjoy Oneness for its desire is subject to an antagonistic relatedness to the desire of the Other. The subject's new awareness pushes it to problematize the hegemonic, unifying discourse of the patriarch, and it results in a subsequent attempt to re-build a more open, processual discourse to confront the subject's alienated condition, and question the enactment of any totalizing fantasy.

Austen postulates that disillusionment and negation should not prevent her subjects from enjoying themselves in an unprogressive, patriarchal society. After a painful process of awakening, the Austenian subjects willingly re-join the gentry class, and insist on reconciling with the patriarchs—even if the reconciliation is false. It is in this sense that Austen's novels anticipate Žižek's critical view of Lacan and Hegel in acknowledging the onset of 'cynical misrecognition'. Cynicism is the 'enlightened false consciousness' that allows the modern subject to *subvert* the system with a sneer, and *put up with* it for the sake of prosperous self-preservation. It is a systematic misrecognition with a certain organization of affirmations and denials, to which the subject is attached. In this way, Austen's 'dialectics of recognition' point neither towards docile conformism nor revolutionary struggle, but an on-going spirit of critique in the midst of misrecognition.

Declaration

The contents of this thesis are the result of the independent research of Wing-chi Ki unless otherwise specified.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank my mother and my sister: their encouragement always gives me the momentum to walk *that* extra mile in whatever journey I have to go.

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A Note on Texts and Abbreviations

Citations of Austen, Hegel, Lacan and Žižek's works are made in the text by following quotations with the standard abbreviations and page numbers (e.g. NA 11, PS 11, S7 11). Page references inserted in Austen's and Hegel's texts are to:

The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R.W.Chapman. 5 vols. Third Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

The Works of Jane Austen, ed. R.W.Chapman. Vol.VI: Minor Works. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others, ed. R.W.Chapman. Second Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Phenomenology of Spirit, trans.A.V.Miller. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Elements of the Philosophy of Right, ed. Allen Wood. Trans. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

The following abbreviations have been used:

NA	<i>Northanger Abbey</i>
SS	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>
PP	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
MP	<i>Mansfield Park</i>
E	<i>Emma</i>
P	<i>Persuasion</i>
PS	<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
PR	<i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i>
E	<i>Écrits. A Selection.</i>
S1	<i>The Seminar. Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-54.</i>
S2	<i>The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55.</i>
S7	<i>The Seminar. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60.</i>
S11	<i>The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964.</i>
SO	<i>The Sublime Object of Ideology</i>
TN	<i>Tarrying with the Negative</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis employs a critical framework developed from dialectical thinking to read Austen's novels. The primary goal of the study is to examine the problem of (mis)recognition which has heightened critical controversy on, and responses to these texts, this in order that they may be reassessed in the light of Austen's complex view of epistemological enlightenment. Austen's notion of enlightenment goes beyond the historical sense of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment movement as Austen, like Hegel, reacts to and critiques the atomistic, rationalistic conception of the self in order to find new pathways to recognize the innate otherness of human subjectivity, to reconcile the self with the world. In her novels, this project of positive reconciliation succeeds—only to end in the knowledge that the eternal presence of lack, or disunity cannot be removed. Eventually, Austen anticipates the twentieth-century view as she foresees human beings will cynically favor false reconciliation due to the call of ideological fantasy.

The need for such study is apparent, for a non-dialectical understanding of Austen in the past has led to the misrecognizing of Austen and the formation of, loosely speaking, two opposing schools. The 'containment school' believes that Austen is a stern propagandist in defense of a beleaguered ruling class. The 'subversive school' upholds the idea that Austen is a lover of irony and equivocal rebelliousness. I suggest that critics read Austen in such ways because they are influenced by various, non-dialectical responses towards enlightenment thought. The enlightenment ideals foreground two elements: *reason* and *improvement*. Reason is valorized as a means of seeking truth (to doubt, to challenge authority, to aim at socio-political progress)—with an emphasis on systematic theorization, monitoring, or manipulation. As philosophers and writers in the later centuries respond positively or negatively to the ideas of Rousseau, Kant or the enlightenment ideal as a whole, the changes of intellectual climate provokes changes of critical opinions towards Austen's text from time to time.

A simplistic overview of Austen criticism is enough to convince us of their inter-relatedness. It would not be difficult to notice that the first wave of Austen critics often debase her works with a Rousseauistic fervor. The consensual opinion is that Austen's novels are too passionless, too a-physical, too small. Austen neglects the

‘passionate self’. Charlotte Brontë’s comments best summarize this school of thought (with followers that include D.H. Lawrence, George Henry Lewes, and Mark Twain): Austen ‘does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well; there is a...miniature delicacy in the painting: she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her...Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and dull, though hidden...this Miss Austen ignores’.¹

The critical tide soon changes. In the early twentieth century, some modernists forfeit romantic subjectivity to favor an aesthetic objectivity, a rational, moral, enlightened, ‘significant form’. The love of efficient form (Bauhaus, Le Corbusier) expresses the optimistic enlightenment ideal with an emphasis on control and planning. In the art scene, the autonomous pursuit culminates in the aesthetic ideal—‘art for art’s sake’, and is an unmistakable legacy of Kantian enlightenment. In his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant defines beauty as an autonomous sphere, which enacts ‘purposiveness without purpose’. Art has a self-contained entity, with an internal order and an external form that do not need justification from outside. Another Kantian definition of beauty is that it reflects the ‘harmony’ of the aesthetic experience—a unity of disunity. While people’s aesthetic judgement differs, Kant says the value of aesthetic experience lies not in individualistic perceptions, but in the harmonious interplay of ‘understanding’ and ‘imagination’ in perceiving an art-object. To explain this clearly, Kant believes that the appreciation of beauty requires understanding—which in turns calls for reason and the use of categorical principles that Kant outlines in the first *Critique*. The admiration of beauty also requires imagination—which calls for a personal but moral display of mental faculties. To Kant, imagination is not a random bestowal of ideas (that would be fancy), but an ability to bring order and unity (a moral end) into a manifold perception. Clement Greenberg’s classic essay ‘Modern Painting’ highlights the relation between modern art and the Enlightenment legacy as he considers Kant to be ‘the first real Modernist’

¹ Letter to W.S. Williams, April 12, 1850 in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B.C. Southam, 128.

(193). Modern art is progressive, autonomous, with a self-contained order. It can only be appreciated and criticized from the inside, hence 'Kantian self-criticism was called on eventually to meet and interpret this demand on areas that lay far from philosophy' (ibid).²

Owing to the love of this self-contained form, Austen's novels suddenly come into the center in the critical scene. Previous critics quietly declare that Austen's novels embody 'smallness', but the second wave of Austenian criticism aims at *canonizing* Austen's 'greatness' because her novels manifest a 'significant form' of merging plot, characterization and a moral message. F.R. Leavis eulogizes Austen's 'moral preoccupation' and aligns her with others novelists in the 'Great Tradition' of literature. The journal *Scrutiny* becomes a battleground for debating wherein lies the greatness of Austen: in her (orthodox) 'formal moralism' or her (subversive) 'amoral formalism'.³ Simply put, critics argue whether Austen's merits lie in her moral forms or her perfection of the 'form' of the novel, without any regard to moral issues. Leavis' view—the form of Austen's novels is linked to her moral concerns—is best worded by David Lodge, who sees Austen's novels as 'fundamentally moral', and that their 'literary values inhere in the formal artistry through which they are communicated'.⁴ Graham Hough attacks this view by arguing that Austen's greatness comes from her presentation, consistent characterization, stylized dialogue, the use of irony, and all this 'formal perfection of the novel' has *nothing* to do with her 'moral preoccupations'.⁵ This line of thinking contributes to the earliest development of the subversive school and culminates in Mudrick's book *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*. In his book, he argues that '[Austen's] earliest, and always her characteristic defense is irony...she observes and defines, without moral or emotional engagement, the incongruities between...form and fact, all the delusions intrinsic to conventional art and conventional society' (1).

Contemporary Austenian criticism has loosely developed itself out of these two extremes. The first stream—the containment school—'ideologizes' Austen's moral

² Greenberg, 'Modern Painting', *Art and Literature* 4 (1965 Spring): 193-201.

³ The early subversive school includes members like D.W. Harding, Mark Schorer, David Daiches, Geoffrey Gorer, and Kingsley Amis. They argue that irony allows Austen to subvert the social values she 'seems' to affirm on the surface. And Austen can discover 'personal equilibrium in a society she detests only through the secret ironies of her art' (Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 7).

⁴ David Lodge, *Emma. A Casebook* 20.

forms. They argue that Austen's ideas, language, plots are deeply implicated in the political, ideological and literary conservatism of her times. Austen is 'great', but she is also a greatly ideologized writer who works for the dominant gentry interests and conspires against individualism. She is a 'Warrior of Ideas: the pupil of Locke and of Bishop Butler, Samuel's daughter, the antagonist of Godwin, the peer of Burke'.⁶ The second stream—the subversive school—revolts against this belief and argues that Austen is 'amorally subversive'. Jane Austen does not favor the dominant values and is a sympathetic supporter of the marginalized class (especially women). Eventually, Austen is 'politicized' as 'a strategist of subversion, indirection and displacement' who fights against 'conservative morality'. Austen's language destabilizes the social discourse of her times and her stories enact a sneaky feminism. By featuring women's predicament, Austen problematizes 'women's relation to patriarchal structures and authority'.⁷

In Austen criticism one particularly notices how the changing response towards the Enlightenment shows in the critics' changing opinion towards her works. The regard for the universal, enlightened 'form' brings forth an intense interest in Austen in the 1940s. However, the revaluation of the Enlightenment as a power-oriented rational-authoritarian project in the sixties and seventies has changed the tide of Austenian studies: it leads critics increasingly to link Austen's 'moral preoccupations' with disciplinary discourses and ideological containment. In the early seventies, Foucault aligns the Enlightenment project with the rise of authoritarian, disciplinary governance. His ideas can be briefly summarized in this way: the rise of the modern subject is the result of normalization and disciplinarization. He believes that the Kantian Enlightenment has led to the birth of two traditions: 'the analytics of truth' is, to Foucault, the *undesirable* tradition that concerns itself with the theorization of truth, knowledge, and a transcendental subjectivity. He problematizes the metanarrative of humanistic morality as grounded in the 'normalizing' tradition of transcendental reason (which implies a fixed concept of human nature, and categorical principles) and can only lead to the justification of homogeneity and domination. The moulding of the modern subject works through

⁵ Graham Hough, *The Dream and The Task* 86.

⁶ Wiltshire *Jane Austen and the Body* 3.

⁷ Ibid 4.

the disciplinary 'discursive practices' and 'the government of individualization' in order to forward the transcendental ideal. With a sophisticated arrangement of discourses, the subject is disciplined to accept power, to adopt a certain mode of speaking, writing and analyzing. Consequently, 'governmentality' is 'an ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and the tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power' to control the mind.⁸ It changes from 'prohibiting specific acts to subject-shaping management of action'. It is not till shortly before his death that Foucault begins to reaffirm the value of the Enlightenment.⁹

In the eighties, Nancy Armstrong valorizes a Foucauldian negative view of the Enlightenment in her reading of Austen's novels. In her eyes, Austen is a characteristic Enlightenment writer whose works function as the conservative accomplice to help construct a disciplinarized, domestic female subject. For Foucault, people become 'subjects' because of a disciplinary 'discursive practice'. And Armstrong reads Austenian 'subjects' as developing in the light of the disciplinary language in the 18th century conduct books and domestic fiction. Austen's novels try to disentangle sexual relations from the language of political power, projecting the social onto the psychological and the language of personal and moral value associated with the feminine to mask socio-economic interests. Armstrong believes that this act can be positive as the disciplinary voice in domestic fiction empowers middle-class women to become writers, enabling them to exercise no little political force. However, the issue of 'governmentality' arises: novelists 'subjectify' women to discipline themselves, and women enjoy only domestic authority in this society. Armstrong highlights that the docile woman is the first modern subject that both disguises and facilitates the authority of disciplinary power, and endorses patriarchal capitalism. The domestic discourse 'not only provided a basis on which numerous competing social groups could each identify their interests

⁸ Foucault, "Governmentality," *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979), 20.

⁹ In his later years, Foucault applauds an alternative element in Kantian Enlightenment which he considers to be incompatible with humanism: i.e. the 'ontology of the present'—the study of the moment, the 'present field of reason' with the Kantian 'mature use of reason'. Foucault places this mature use of reason at the heart of his 'ethics of self-creation'. His later work explores the Enlightenment project's potential on developing an alternate subjectivity—through the analysis of specificity, 'a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy'. See Foucault 'What is Enlightenment?' *Foucault Reader*, 32-50.

but also provided a form of power exercised through constant supervision and the regulation of desire, thus preparing the cultural ground in which capitalism could flourish'.¹⁰ To her, Austen and other early novelists concretize an 'enlightened', discursive space to promote a gendered division of labor and incarceration of women in the bourgeois sphere. 'These quite different texts' form 'a single voice and a continuous discourse'.¹¹ Women enjoy a moral ascendancy to overcome class barriers (Pamela and Elizabeth's rise to wealth); however, this morality is always 'socially manipulated and defined'.¹² Using a disciplinary language, Jane Austen suppresses 'alternative forms of literacy'. Polite manners and polite standard English are 'made politically and morally normative'.¹³ Hence, Armstrong postulates that Austen's novels help police the mind, domesticate women, and aid class formation.¹⁴

This view is problematized by critics who react positively to the Enlightenment, and in particular, to Enlightenment feminism. Margaret Kirkham likens Austen to Wollstonecraft and argues that both writers were committed to principles of the Enlightenment—reason, the critique of power, tradition and prejudices. Both writers are progressive enough to discard paternal influences in philosophical tradition, and foreground women's capacity to enjoy enlightened reflection. Austen's novels echo Wollstonecraft's 'Enlightenment moralism' and advocate that women should not be ignorant, or be represented as fickle, sentimental creatures following the literary portrayal of her times. Kirkham's observation is well-founded. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) argues that rhetorical instruction is essential so that women can be educated to become moral agents. Women's 'first duty...is to themselves as rational creatures' (218). She critiques an English society that is all about men and the 'security of property', and argues that independence ought to stem from reason rather than property (52). She inverts the ideals of 'family practices': 'the perpetuation of property in our families' actually corrupts natural

¹⁰ Nancy Armstrong, 'Introduction' in *The Conduct of Ideology*, 12.

¹¹ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 94.

¹² Nancy Armstrong, "The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel", *Novel* 15 (1982 Winter), 132.

¹³ *Ibid.* 133.

¹⁴ In the words of Armstrong, 'by sexing the social world', 'this body of writing produced a single ideal of the household. And this ideal in turn helped to generate the belief that there was such a thing as the middle class well before one existed in any other form. By the end of the eighteenth century, people thought of society in terms of a class sexuality, for in contrast with both the landed aristocracy with its libertine appetites and the promiscuous mob was the sanctuary of middle-class love.' (*The Conduct of Ideology* 12)

familial bonds. Parents tyrannize children in order to aggrandize the family estate, and tend to endorse convenience marriages. The practice of primogeniture also leads to countless ‘unnatural crimes’: ‘The younger children have been sacrificed to the eldest son; sent into exile, or confined in convents, that they might not encroach on what was called, with shameful falsehood, the *family* estate’ (44-6). To Wollstonecraft, the ‘natural parental affection’ *should* ‘make no difference between child and child, but what reason justifies by pointing out superior merit’ (ibid). Many of Austen’s novels can be read as a vivid illustration of Wollstonecraft’s beliefs. Austen loves to foreground how women can undertake enlightened reflection, and how women and second sons are the usual victims of social and family practices.

Also in this camp is Claudia Johnson, who optimistically views Austen’s works as the voice of liberation in the eighteenth century. She argues that ‘through various means of indirection—irony, antithetical pairing, double plotting, the testing or subverting of overt, typically doctrinaire statement with contrasting dramatic incident’, Austen’s novels challenge ‘the norms’.¹⁵ Austen’s novels become a set of resistant, ironic discourses to ‘expose and explore those aspects of traditional institutions—marriage, primogeniture, patriarchy—which patently do not serve her heroines well’.¹⁶ Claudia Johnson questions the alignment of Austen with Foucault or conduct books: ‘In endowing with rich and unapologetic senses of self-consequence, Austen defies every dictum about female propriety and deference propounded in the sermons and conduct books which have been thought to shape her opinions on all important matters’. And she further asserts that Austen’s independent spirit is comparable to the premises of Wollstonecraft: ‘Although many novels written from the beginning until the end of Austen’s career referred positively or negatively to *The Rights of Woman*, no allusions were necessary to remind audiences that female characterization, such as Emma’s or Fanny’s, was already a politicized issue in and of itself, and Austen’s handling of this problem is perhaps the most independent of all her contemporaries’.¹⁷

The problem of the non-dialectical approach is that it fails to account for the complexity of Austen’s vision. As critics praise or criticize Austen by selecting *one*

¹⁵ Claudia Johnson, *Women, Politics and the Novel*, xxiv.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. xxiii.

facet—moral questions, novelistic form, gentry ideology or women issues—according to the intellectual climate of the times (filtered through the period's response to the Enlightenment project), they fail to recognize and contextualize Austen's peculiar concept of enlightenment in her novels. My study of Austen leads me to put forward the idea that Austen's notion of enlightenment often upholds a dialectic between progress and non-improvement, between the quest for reflective sovereignty and the unquestioning observance of the social imperative, the insistence on compliance and the insistence on critique, the need for order and the questioning of that order. In this regard, the non-dialectical approach can only blind readers by neglecting the 'contradictory synthesis' of containment and subversiveness in Austen's novels. For example, the 'containment' critics like Babb and Duckworth believe that Austen is a defender of conservative social and political ideals, citing the fact that Austen endorses a classical, Johnsonian language, or upholds paternal values like the 'estate'. This view is challenged by the 'subversive' critics like Mudrick, Harding, Kirkham, and Claudia Johnson. A classical language does not preclude the possibility of a skeptical discourse. They come to see that Austen's classical, ironic language questions the mawkish (feminine) literature of her times in order to dignify the voice of women writers. Meanwhile, her conflictual-unreliable narration is the best weapon to refute the conservative, patriarchal views in her society. Instead of endorsing any unprogressive belief, Austen features, inside the 'family estate', the pains of the marginalized subjects and their carceral entrapment, the tyranny of primogeniture. Furthermore, Austen does challenge all the authoritarian figures inside the estates, their 'prohibiting acts', their 'subject-shaping management' of the young ones' behavior. However, this symptomatic reading of Austen's subversiveness also downplays the fact that Austen *does* restore all her female and male subjects to a sane, joyful reconciliation with the traditional practices—marriage, primogeniture and patriarchy. Despite what Claudia Johnson says, the happy endings show that these traditional practices suit Austen's heroes and heroines very well. The portrayal of a subversive Austen is further embarrassed by the fact that Austen may question the norm, but she does *not* endorse any overt challenges of the tradition. Emma Woodhouse's love of spinsterhood is foregrounded as an exceptional case. All of Austen's subjects are schooled in reality

in order to return to the imperative social unconscious. In addition, the realistic question of livelihood in the eighteenth or nineteenth century leads Austen to narrate a world in which people always get allied with the established class and interested parties. The Austenian subject might view the world with (progressive) hostility; however, in the words of Duckworth, ‘what is remarkable is how positively they respond, either consistently or finally, to the...world they encounter’. They yield to the ‘inherited structure of values and behavior’.¹⁸

* * *

The aim of this study, consequently, is to develop an alternative framework within which to re-read Austen to meet these objections; one which is flexible enough to account for why the two schools’ are inadequate, but rigorous enough to shed new lights on Austen’s idea of enlightenment—namely, her insistence on the ‘positive recognition’, the ‘negative cognition’, and the ‘cynical misrecognition’. The complexity of Austen’s novels lies in the fact that she loves the ideal of enlightenment—rational reconciliation and improvement, but she also pessimistically sees that universal improvement or reconciliation is an impossible project in the everyday world. For the sake of survival or social harmony, Austen’s enlightened subjects willingly embrace an ideologized ‘enlightened’ choice to take part in the paternal, dominant gentry class. And ideological fantasy serves to bring the whole community together. In this sense, as I will later argue, Austen’s project bears close affinity to Hegel’s vision—with a characteristic nineteenth-century faith in enlightenment reason and improvement; but she is also a forerunner of the twentieth century Lacanian and Zizekian views—with a clear knowledge of non-progress and a cynical love of ideological interests. In this study, Hegel, Lacan, and Zizek’s *inter-related* theories are used not only to show how the notion of ‘enlightenment’ has changed its course in the last two hundred years, but also to foreground how Austen’s novels have dialectically embedded and anticipated these views in their quiet, clairvoyant way.

Austen, Dialectic and Hegel’s Positive Recognition

In the first place, it is through the notion of the ‘dialectic’ that I have come to align Austen with Hegel. By definition, a dialectical process has three stages: ‘1)

¹⁸ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 7.

One or more concepts or categories are taken as fixed, sharply defined and distinct from each other. This is the stage of understanding. 2) When we reflect on such categories, one or more contradictions emerge in them. This is the stage of dialectic proper. 3) The result of this dialectic is a new, higher category, which embraces the earlier categories and resolves the contradiction involved in them'.¹⁹ The new category is a 'unity of opposites'. In Austen's novels, we can always discover this higher union of the opposites in which the Austenian subjects learn to reflect for themselves. At the end, opposing consciousnesses become reconciled. Subjects like Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet, and Frederick Wentworth finally realize their inadequacies, and admit the valid way of the Other. In this regard, the Hegelian method helps unveil a *specific* mechanism in Austen's novels as the dominant subjects strive to recognize, incorporate differences through 'positive recognition', to arrive at a reconciliatory improvement emblemized by dialogue, or marriage. Her novels narrate how each subject is tied 'to the specificity of its discernible stages and capable of surpassing them' under the logic of sublation—'the ability to absorb and transcend constitutive parts in forming a fully coherent, integral whole'.²⁰

While critics often categorize Austen's novels under the notion of the *Bildungsroman*, they do not often make the connection between Hegel's notion of *Bildung* and Austen's *Bildungsroman*. As the Austenian subjects experience mistakes and conflicts, and struggle for an enlightened state of being, this process actually embodies Hegel's idea of *Bildung*—the discipline of culture, education, formation—in order to attain a balance between particular self-interest with impersonal reason and morality.²¹ The crux of Austen's novels often means the dramatization of this Hegelian process as her subjects have to undergo a period of enlightened self-alienation and relinquishment so as to 're-create' the self for larger, nobler causes. Even though the world at large may give little economic, social support to the enlightened subjects, Austen still values the essentiality of *Bildung* as

¹⁹ Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, trans. William Wallace, §79-82, 113-121.

²⁰ Richard Barney, "Subjectivity, The Novel, And the *Bildung* Blocks of Critical Theory. Introduction", *Genre* XXVI (Winter 1993), 360.

²¹ Ibid.

it means 'not only education, but maturation, fulfillment, joy, suffering, a drenching in the stream of time and an emergence to the plateau of judgment'.²²

A closer examination of Austen and Hegel's works further reveals a striking affinity between the two contemporary but fundamentally unrelated thinkers. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel employs his positive dialectics not only as a methodology, but as an argument to theorize and illustrate the evolution of the enlightened subject. If we take a *general* (or holistic) view of Austen's developmental subjects in her six novels, Austen's views coincide head-on with Hegel's perspectives expressed in the second part of the *Phenomenology*. Austen starts her literary career by narrating the limits of the naïve mind (NA), then she turns to examine the problems of the romantic 'law of the heart' and the pains of the virtuous subject (SS). The rise of the strong consciousness produce a 'life-and-death struggle' between two masters (PP); however, as the masters become corrupt, the slave will eventually win the battle in the long run (MP). The moral mind wavers between the love of noble principles and self-interest, and its moral hypocrisy can only be healed by conscience (E). The conscientious allegiance to abstract ideals produces a 'beautiful soul', but its suffering makes the subject understand that happiness is a compromise between ideals and individuality (P). In what follows, we will explore these Hegelian concepts in detail so as to have a better grasp of the 'positive enlightenment'.

For Hegel, the purpose of the *Phenomenology* is to launch a polemic against Kant's philosophy of 'excessive' subject sovereignty.²³ In opposition to the Kantian subject, Hegel hypothesizes an 'Other-oriented' philosophy to foreground *the*

²² GA Kelly, *Idealism, Politics and History* 342.

²³ Kant's philosophy aims at foregrounding the role of the 'transcendental self'. Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' wants to place the self as the center and origin of knowledge. He argues that in each subject there harbors some *a priori* categories to make the subject's world-perception stable, and terminate the possibility of solipsism in reading reality. This notion ultimately comes from the subject's ability to have a good understanding/processing of rules or information (e.g. a stable idea of logic, or measurement). Hence, he switches to argue for a unity of the subject—'There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions...This pure original unchangeable consciousness I shall name *transcendental apperception*' (*Critique of Pure Reason* A107, 158). This thinking subject, capable of processing different realities, representations, entails the presence of a transcendental 'center' (the faculty of knowledge) to unify experiences, connections, comparisons. In short, Kant begins by proposing the unity of *object*-perception, and ends in affirming the unity of the *subject* to finish his 'Copernican revolution'. In the eighteenth century context, Kant's philosophy directly grounded the romantics' (e.g. Wordsworth, Coleridge) idea of the supreme self.

dialectic between the Other and the self. In short, the center of the Hegelian enlightenment is that the subject is formed by the Other-consciousness and laws. His project of reconciliation is to destroy the illusory autonomy of the subject, to recognize and balance the Other and ethical laws in 'me' and reach a state of intersubjective recognition—thereby breaking the philosophical boundary between self and Other, the abstract laws and the concrete self. In this light, the Hegelian move splits itself from the Cartesian tradition (the emphasis on 'I', the cogito vs the Other) as the subject aims at incorporating the Other, society, and eventually, the world-consciousness in the self—for the self comes *not* from its own, but from the Other. The journey to the Other is essential in order to recognize the heterogeneity of the subject's origin. Thus Gadamer says,

The dialectical process of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is determined by nothing so much as by the problem of the recognition of the 'Thou'. To mention only a few stages of this history: our own self-consciousness, for Hegel, attains to the truth of its self-consciousness only through achieving its *recognition by the other person*. The immediate relationship between a man and a woman is the natural knowledge of mutual recognition. Beyond this, conscience represents the mental element of being recognized, and mutual self-recognition, in which the mind is absolute, can be attained only via confession and forgiveness (emphasis added).²⁴

At the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel fights his 19th century philosophical battle by refuting the traditional 'misrecognition of methodology'. Misrecognition is the *false* recognition that one must discard. In the first 'philosophical' part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel says the true philosopher must resist the temptation of interrupting the subject matter by introjecting his own interpretive model. Instead, the phenomenological method is to submerge his/her freedom in the content and let the content be moved through its own nature, that is, let the consciousness 'examine' 'its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply to look on', to observe its movement (PS 54). Hence, he simply bypasses the classical philosophical orientation (to find a central criterion to study truth) and devotes himself to the 'observation' of 'the negative movement' in phenomena. It is particularly important to note that Hegel, by bracketing the ultimate truth/knowledge (thus he avoids the necessity of establishing any criterion or the true thing-in-itself),

has foregrounded the importance of negation and changes in 'recognition'. His whole philosophical endeavor aims at 'describing' the subject's changing perception and narrating a 'phenomenological knowledge' and the 'examination of the reality of cognition' as it appears in time (PS 52).

In the second part of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel switches to highlight the (anthropological) development of 'self-consciousness' in the social world. In this section, Hegel says that the subject is neither self-positing, nor does it enjoy any degree of unity. The subject experiences nothing but alienation and tension everyday. Instead of philosophical argument, Hegel's phenomenological 'descriptive' narrative draws heavily on diverse literary sources to construct the subject's growth, its changing 'shapes of consciousness'. Hegel borrows ideas from *Antigone*, *Faust*, Goethe's notion of '*Bildungsroman*', Diderot's *Nephew of Rameau* and the romantic figure of the 'beautiful soul'. (Thus Pippin says *PS* has no predecessors in its genre for its hybrid mixing of philosophical and literary concepts, which make the work itself a story, a *Bildungsroman*²⁵). Hegel's positive 'dialectic of recognition' is to make the subject recognize its own Otherness, and reconcile with the Other and the world.

The young, naïve subject innocently (mis)recognizes itself to be the center of world, and starts its life with an inadequate recognition of the Other. To Hegel, this egocentrism is essentially a misrecognition for the subject, in its naïve autonomy, always desires the Other, and is already Otherized by existing customs. He postulates that the 'naïve consciousness' is already governed by 'unwritten laws and social customs, a framework within which the individual lives and moves, and from which he does not think to disassociate himself' (PS 541). However, the subject does not understand its Otherness: 'to live as a mere individual in an organized social whole is *not*...to be explicitly conscious of one's identity with it. One may either have forgotten it in a mere taking for granted, or may not as yet have fully achieved it' (ibid). At this stage of 'naïve consciousness', the individual's life goal is to seek self-gratification and pleasure. The whole concept of 'being-for-itself' is defined by the

²⁴ Gadamer *Truth and Method*, 307-8.

²⁵ Robert Pippin, "'You Can't Get There from Here': Transition Problem in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 78.

subject's ego-centrism, in which (legitimate or illegitimate) self-interest predominates over the concern for the Other. The naïve subject favors its 'immediate will and natural impulses, not the welfare of the society' (ibid). But Hegel highlights the paradox that the existence of a 'pure self' is impossible: it is always an 'Otherized egoism'. In the height of the subject's self-centeredness, the subject has always incorporated a crude social consciousness and subordinated its impulses to social customs while it seeks pleasures (c.p. Austen's representation of the naïve subject—Catherine Morland—in *Northanger Abbey*). This 'social unconscious' is eventually abandoned at a later stage—as the subject turns to practice selfishness. The selfish subject is aware of the existing moral laws or social customs; however, it prioritizes impulses and subordinates social customs to its wish, henceforth justifying a pure being-in-and-for-itself—at the expense of the Other. Hegel considers this to result in a 'lost ethical order' (PS §357, 215).

In a section called 'Pleasure and Necessity', Hegel foregrounds the dangers of not recognizing the innate Otherness or social unconscious in the self. He quotes the Faust legend to suggest that 'pure individuality' is by nature self-misrecognizing and self-destructing. His argument can be briefly summarized in this way: the subject wants to enjoy an 'Independent pleasure', yet it can only destroy itself because the subject is not genuinely 'independent'. First, its desire is always mediated through the desire for the Other, i.e. its pleasure is a pleasure to *have* the Other/an object; second, by having the Other, or an object, this subject feels gratified and can return to itself. But the possession of an entity (food, computer, designer bags, a woman) would mean the end of desire. Hence, tension arises between the subject's longing and its fulfillment (as gratification becomes problematic or sometimes even undesirable). To seek more pleasures, Hegel concludes that '[t]here is therefore a blind necessity driving one on to seek ever new objects in unending self-frustration' (PS 542). Owing to this displeasurable game (desire-hunting-possession-frustration), the selfish subject begins to understand that there must exist a law, which it cannot fully understand, but to which it must unconditionally submit in order to remain happy, and avoid frustration. To Hegel, growth at this stage means the subject must

negate its egocentric tendency by yielding to the power of an alien 'lawgiver' and the 'law'.²⁶

The rise of a law for the sheer purpose of giving comfort and happiness to the subject is named by Hegel as 'the law of the heart'. The subject still yearns for a pleasure-oriented existence; however, it believes that, with this law, it has incorporated some 'universal' or moral elements to endorse its search for happiness. This law is eventually the 'law of the individual's own heart', which must be differentiated from the actual law of the world. Hegel postulates that the heart-ruled subject is a lover of 'moralized' pleasurable sensations, and the subject argues that its way is the true way, and the world is the origin of oppression. The dialectical clash between the individual and the Other arises because the subject's law is too personal and self-oriented to be truly universal. The heart-ruled individual believes itself to be 'just' and 'noble' in carrying out its laws. It cannot see that this law must either clash with other heart-ruled people's (equally subjective) laws or with the law of the world. As other individuals will condemn what the heart-ruled subject dictates ('not every individual's heart will concur with the chosen course' PS 543), the high-minded, unconsciously pleasure-seeking heart-ruled subject will find the hearts of other people 'detestable' (PS §373, 224)—for they oppose its excellent intentions. In the face of clashes with the law of the world, the heart-ruled subject will resort to a 'frenzy of self-conceit' to denounce social customs as an 'intolerable constriction upon the individuality of the law of the heart'.²⁷ While the heart-ruled subject condemns the world as despotic, it actually intends to build an equally tyrannical law (so that every heart will agree upon this law). Hegel believes that the struggle—between the subject's insistence on its law and the realization that this heart-law is not genuinely universal—will lead the subject to a new stage of negation. The subject will turn to the ideal of virtue.

To Hegel, virtue is the result of the subject's rational determination to do good, and to incorporate a larger cause into its 'self'. The subject still longs for pleasure,

²⁶ The French movie *Fan Fan* is an effectual illustration of this Hegelian situation. The hero is sick of the modern self-frustrating game of romance: 'having' means 'dying' (courtship→relationship/sex→end of desire/lust and the onset of insipidity). He decides to woo a lady using a new law so that his desire for her would never die (i.e. by following the moral dictates of platonic love, by loving and not having her; by maintaining a distance between desire and the consummation of desire).

but it rejects the pseudo-universal heart-law, or worldly pursuits. The virtuous subject believes pleasure must submit to a 'disinterested universality', a 'disinterested order through individual effort' (PS §381, 228). This is not to say that the virtuous subject does not love pleasure, wealth and status, but it differs from the worldly person in terms of their methods. The worldly person has no scruples in search of fast-track material gain, but the virtuous subject—bounded by moral practices and reason—lacks such directness. As virtue demands a repression of the self for an *abstract* moral being-for-the-Other, Hegel believes that the virtuous subject is always bitter due to: first, the negation of its individuality for an abstract cause; and secondly, to its slow possession of social good (e.g. wealth) in comparison with other people. Austen's view coincides with and ultimately differs from Hegel's view. Austen's virtuous subject—for example, Elinor or Edward Ferrars—is not entirely free from bitter comparison with others; however, she puts particular emphasis on highlighting the gratification of virtue for its own sake. But Hegel—in an attempt to reject the Kantian insistence on pure reason or abstract morality—proclaims that pure virtue signifies an empty universality for it 'abolishes the individuality which is the very principle of actuality' (PS §389, 233). In this dialectic between the abstract and the particular interest, Hegel concludes that virtue can only bring 'boredom' and can only be 'life-denying'. Hegel encourages the re-emergence of individuality for he believes self-interest is necessary for the functioning of the mind. Private interest can indirectly lead the subject to attain a good end. Hence he postulates that the repressive subject will turn to seek a balanced life which 'takes itself to be real in and for itself'.

In this way, the subject enters into a new consciousness constituted by reason and *Bildung*. This is essentially a stage of self-enrichment, as well as a stage of self-relinquishment (*Entäusserung*)—or what Robinson calls the 'surrender [of] the self to the universal elements...which constitute its own true nature'²⁸. The subject now recognizes its intrinsic relatedness to the Other, that its identity relies on 'the continued existence and unforced recognition of the other'²⁹. The subject alienates itself from the love of immediate pleasure, gives up its adherence to abstract

²⁷ Robert Stern, *Hegel, Kant, and the Structure of the Object*, 49.

²⁸ Jonathan Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, 24.

²⁹ Robert Williams, *Recognition*, 145.

principles to follow the voice of reason. To Hegel, reason contains ‘the unity of objective freedom (i.e. freedom of the universal or substantial will) and subjective freedom (i.e. freedom of everyone in his knowing and in his volition of particular ends)’ (PR §258, 276). As a result, the subject can use reason to make ‘self-determining action’ based on ‘thoughts’ and ‘universal laws (ibid)’. In turn, the process of *Bildung* urges the subject to forfeit dependency and be a self-responsible agent. In the end, the subject possesses a larger degree of freedom and self-determination for it is not bound by narrow-minded pleasures, dogmatic laws, or prejudices. The subject enters into social membership and self-government because it recognizes it is only in reason and in duty that ‘the individual acquires substantive freedom’ (PR §149, 192). Charles Taylor characterizes this progress as the participatory ‘moral obligations’ in an ongoing community ‘of which I am a part’³⁰. To Hegel, reason and duty bring ‘liberation’—‘first liberation from dependence on mere natural impulse;...secondly, liberation from the...subjectivity which remains self-enclosed and devoid of actuality’ (PR §149, 192). Hegel describes this acculturated stage as a stage of ‘doubling’: ‘Self consciousness is in and for itself in and through the fact that it exists in and for itself *for an other*...The concept of this unity is in its doubling’ (PhS §178). In short, it means that the subject can judge for itself, however, it also has an eye on the Other and social laws. Through *Bildung*, the ‘individual self assimilates the content of its society and culture and so achieves significances and actuality’.³¹

In the course of human history, a self-responsible, self-determining agent is ultimately embodied by the master. The master sets its own laws, and upholds these laws with an eye on social concerns and its own interests. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explains the nature of the master in this way: the master is a strong and autonomous subject; hence, the dialectic between the self-determination and interrelatedness must begin anew for the subject will struggle with the Other the moment it encounters an Other-consciousness. The rational master will fight to declare its ‘correct’ reason/knowledge and negate any opposite view. If the two subjects are equally strong and rational, there will be a ‘life-and-death struggle’. And

³⁰ Taylor, *Hegel*, 376.

³¹ Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, 24.

the challenge of a powerful equal may turn out to be a positive route towards intersubjective recognition and tolerance. For Hegel, confrontation between human beings—due to the different strength of mind, body and character—will usually end in a master-slave situation in the social context. The strong subject will win and will want to arrogantly reduce the Other to a state of insignificance. Hegel inverts the traditional glory attributed to the masters. In the *Phenomenology*, he suggests that the master has violated its innate relatedness to people—for ‘self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness’.³² And satisfaction must come only from an ‘unforced recognition’ on the part of the Other. Hence, the independent master feels an increasing *ennui* because the slave’s forced deference, plus its low status, is inadequate to mirror its importance. Hegel thinks the master’s life can only be self-defeating. The mediated nature of subjectivity requires the subject to treat the Other in an egalitarian, respectful manner if the subject wants to be genuinely recognized.

While Hegel considers the virtuous subject’s abstract being-for-the-Other to be ‘life-denying’, he postulates that the slave’s *concrete* being-for-the-Other will lead to success. Through labor and hardship, the slave eventually discovers a new identity and moral consciousness by means of disidentification with the master. The negation of the slave turns out to be a process of affirmation (PS §195, 118). Austen’s view coincides with Hegel’s optimism. In *Mansfield Park*, the conflicts between the rich and the slave only leads to the dialectical victory of servanthood. Like Austen, Hegel postulates that the slave must experience varied states of alienated consciousness (namely, stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness) prior to its rise. To Hegel, stoicism is the synonym of escapism in which the slave negates the ‘unfreedom of being’ by means of a compensatory, ‘*imaginary* freedom of thought’. In the ‘utter dependence of its individual existence’, the slave’s aim is ‘to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought’ (PS §199, 121). In other words, the slave abstracts all concrete pain to indifference, and imagines that it has ‘conquered’ reality. Robert Stern points out that stoicism foregrounds a dialectical struggle towards self-realization: as the slave’s

³² Robert Williams, *Recognition*, 175.

individuality is being negated, it turns to stoicism to seek a 'false universality in the pure abstraction of thought'.³³ But stoicism actually heightens the contradiction (instead of reconciliation) between the individual and the Other: the subject lives an imaginary life, it cannot achieve a 'genuine universality in the social sphere'.

Skepticism marks the slave's on-going attempt to favor an imaginary power and to abstract itself from everyday existence. The slave doubts reality and the world's idea of the norm. Through this act, the slave establishes an (imaginary) authority by believing it can 'secure a truth it has itself determined and established' (PS §204, 124). By doubting the master and other people's authority, the slave establishes its judgment, and evades the restless, painful flux of its status in the world. It also aims at possessing a self-certainty that it does not have (i.e. it challenges everybody). Hegel calls this imaginary process to absolutize the self an 'absolute dialectical unrest' (PS §205, 124). At a later stage, apart from doubting others, the subject switches to an unhappy consciousness to doubt its own judgement. The slave-subject questions itself as the origin of authority (hence no more self-certainty); instead, the subject turns to an absolute authority (e.g. doctrines, laws or religion) to make absolute judgement. The dialectic of the universal and individual is once again re-enacted in which subject particularity is repressed for rules. This doctrinal negation of the self is actually an act of empowerment as the slave-subject anchors itself on a widely recognized, powerful authority. Hegel predicts that this identification with pure universality must end in contradiction: the subject 'cannot unite itself with its unchangeable essence without importing changeableness into that essence and so starting a fresh cycle of struggle and misery' (PS 525). In other words, as no one can completely follow the doctrinal laws without failures, failures will lead the subject to miserably realize its limits. The increasing gap between the individual and the universal can only reduce the slave-subject to a painful situation: it cannot perfectly adhere to the laws though it wants to. The subject solves the problem by placing itself in the hands of a mediator or a third-party arbitrator (e.g. the priest's absolution). In doing so, it can sublimate differences and reconcile with the universal ideal. Hegel considers the slave's longing for an 'abstract reconciliation' to be an inauthentic act. But he also highlights that this can be a positive step to incorporate a truly Other-

³³ Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object*, 46.

consciousness in the subject's mindscape, and enjoy, *in principle*, 'a unity of objectivity and being-for-self' (PS §230, 138). In the end, while the master is trapped by its 'self', the slave discovers a higher power, a genuinely lofty order that is no longer created or imagined by itself. However, since the individual is not fully in harmony with this order, this unity is by nature unstable as the tension between the two remains unresolved.

Hegel theorizes that only love can terminate the life and death struggle and the master-slave dialectic. Love—in the form of respect, appreciation—can let the Other be an Other, and let mutual recognition and social reconciliation take place. For Hegel, love, especially romantic love, has the power to crush alienation and enact the rational union of the mind and heart, the self and the Other, the personal and the moral elements in the civil society. In his words, love 'is just this: to give up its particularity, its private personality, and to expand these to universality.....In friendship and in love I give up my abstract personality and thereby win it back as concrete'.³⁴ In love, there is a spontaneous, voluntary process of reciprocal recognition, mutual releasement of the self and the Other. Romantic love realizes 'the right of the subject's particularity to find satisfaction' in the Other (PR §158, 199). Hegel regards the family as a place where particular and social, moral interests merge. However, Hegel also realizes that romantic love cannot mean an absolute union, and cannot be exempt from conflicts and antagonism. As the two consciousnesses will keep struggling for dominance, love implies an on-going dialectical struggle between the subject's being-for-itself and its being-in-and-through-the-Other.

In the ethical realm, the subject's incorporation of the ideals-in-the-self marks the rise of a new, nobler selfhood. However, due to the gap between personal interest and grand ideals, the subject also carries with itself a subtle confusion of an allegiance to self and an altruistic allegiance to the universal good. The subject believes that it stands for the universal good, but in fact it is merely working for its self-interest. Problems occur when the subject deliberately collapses the two categories. It can lead to moral nihilism because the subject simply justifies private

³⁴ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Vol. III: The Consummate Religion* tr. and ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: California UP 1985), 285-6.

ends using grand, moral discourses, henceforth no longer taking any conception of right or wrong seriously.

In an era of sophisticated nihilism, Hegel reckons that all people claim they represent the universal, and speak the universal (religious, or moral) language—while they seek wealth, power, revenge or pleasures for themselves. The noble-minded consciousness descends into worldliness and becomes ‘indistinguishable from the base consciousness’ (PS 559), and takes up ‘a speech which is fully aware of its confused state’ (PS §523, 318). As these subjects deploy moral, substantive values to court personal interests, Hegel concludes that the ‘final product of culture’ is the ‘inversion’ of void and substance. ‘Everything becomes void of substance and confounded with its opposite’:

What is learnt in this world is that neither the *actuality* of power and wealth, nor their specific *Notions*, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or the consciousness of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (the noble and the ignoble consciousness), possess truth; on the contrary, all these moments become inverted, one changing into the other, and each is the opposite of itself. (PS §521, 316).

In other words, moral notions no longer exist (morality, the ‘universal power, which is the *Substance*...receives its own self merely as a name, and though it is the *actuality* of power, is really the powerless being that sacrifices its own self’ *ibid*). Under such circumstances, Hegel suggests that only one language—wit—can best express this hybrid confusion/contamination of the high and the low, the moral and the immoral, the valued and the valueless, the diffused consciousness and the focused pursuit of revenge/wealth/power. Here he comments on the work of Diderot (*Nephew of Rameau*): with the ‘perversion of every Notion and reality, the universal deception of itself and others’, ‘shamelessness’ becomes ‘the greatest truth’ (PS §522, 317). Thus he approves of witty talk in which the

madness of the musician...heaped up and mixed together thirty arias, Italian, French, tragic, comic, of every sort; now with a deep bass he descended into hell, then contracting his throat, he rent the vaults of heaven with a falsetto tone, frantic and soothed, imperious and mocking, by turns. (PS §522, 318)

As sanity no longer works, witty discourses lay bare the madness of the world, the confusion of good and bad. Hegel considers that wit can be liberating as it enjoys a ‘spiritual freedom’ in the midst of the disintegrated consciousness.

In reaction to the collapse of morality, Hegel suggests that the subject now retreats to faith, and pure insight. The subject valorizes an other-worldly discourse (religion) to re-assert moral boundaries; however, as religion points towards a remote region of time and space, the subject feels frustrated. The subject switches to a secular pursuit: the pure insight or reason of the Enlightenment. To Hegel, pure insight persecutes superstition because it is not of this world. In contrast to spirituality, pure insight is primarily a worldly discourse that upholds 'reason' and 'utility'. The idea of 'rational utility' is an invaluable tool because it can reconcile everything: everything has its use, everyone is a vital part in the macrosystem. Hegel considers 'rational utility' to be the 'principle of enlightenment' as planners believe 'heaven' can now be 'transplanted to earth below' (PS §581, 355). However, nightmare soon occurs. In order to locate and centralize everybody in a useful position, the rational 'general will' becomes an autocratic tyrant which abstracts people and assigns them certain duties. Owing to the fact that no individual can live with this empty 'dutiful' abstraction, the 'general will' reckons that the inevitable rise of the concrete self must be suppressed by force and Terror. Hence Hegel theorizes the Reign of Terror as the natural outcome of enlightenment reason. As pure insight utilizes, formalizes, and hierarchizes everything into an absolute, useful order, it must defend its empty rational uniformity with ruthless measures. In the words of Findlay, 'consciousness in this phase makes duty the absolute substance and essence...[to defend] a Nature morally meaningless, governed by laws that have nothing to do with morality' (PS 568).³⁵

Hegel argues that the individual's particularity must re-surface. Eventually, the empty consciousness will be overcome by the subject's progression to a new moral stage. Instead of being assigned to certain places, the subject resorts to *moral choices* to seek a union of its individuality and the command of duty. However, the dialectic conflict between the individual and the law begins again: the enlightened subject's conduct is tied inevitably to specific aims. 'Moral duplicity' occurs when the

³⁵ The movie *Terminator* can best illustrate this Hegelian concept of enlightenment horror/pure insight. The pure insight of machines cannot tolerate human inefficiency and concrete individuality. Human uprising (led by the legendary figure John Conner) must therefore be ruthlessly terminated. The rational machine symbolizes a 'universal will which in its ultimate abstractness has nothing positive left in it'. 'From this reign of terror, Spirit is unable to return to the concreteness of the realms of culture and faith' (PS 568).

subject's action fails to conform to what it ought to be. Under such circumstances, only conscience can resolve the above contradiction because 'In conscience we, for the first time, give content to the empty pattern of duty, right, and the pure will, and lend it authentic existence' (PS §633, 384). As conscience unites personal decision with moral laws, conscience cannot be abstract or empty. Conscience 'cannot satisfy itself in the fulfillment of an impersonal, universal purpose: it necessarily demands also that the individual person be satisfied' (PS 569). The subject is therefore allowed to have a self-determined freedom to balance between universal and private interests. The subject has absorbed moral laws into itself, and recognizes what is 'intrinsic and what is a matter of myself', what is 'the pure End'. By highlighting subject particularity in its decision, conscience heals all inconsistencies caused by the subject's submitting 'its decisions to the empty arbitrament of some general standard' (ibid). Conscience is simultaneously personal and universal as its 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-other' become 'the universal in-itselfness' (PS §646, 393). As a result, conscience has the highest judicial powers—it 'gives universal validity to the actions of the individual self' (PS 576).

In short, Hegel valorizes a conscience that is Other-related, and yet, self-sufficient and self-determining. The conscientious subject makes decisions with a self-assured certainty. Conscience is self-sufficient for no one can determine what is conscientious for the other—if a person proclaims s/he has acted conscientiously, people can only believe her/him. Due to the same reason, Hegel notes that the primacy of conscience is not without its dangers. While the subject believes in conscientious self-determinacy and reckons it has acted justly, it will sometimes have doubts whether other 'equally authentic consciences' will approve of its deed or not. Owing to its lonely, self-legitimizing tendency, the conscientious subject cannot know whether its conscience is 'morally good or evil' (PS §649, 395). Instead of self-certainty, the subject begins to have self-doubt as it exercises its isolating sovereignty. With increasing insecurity, the subject seeks overt principles for guidance and reassurance—hence it quickly loses the concrete individuality it once possessed. The dialectic of the universal and individual begins anew when the subject favors the voice of pure rules and descends into an empty universality.

Hegel calls this sophisticated conscientious subject the ‘beautiful soul’, using a literary concept popular in his times. His allusion to the beautiful soul has deep literary relations: Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Schlegel’s *Lucinde*, Jacobi’s *Allwill* and *Woldemar*, Holderlin’s *Hyperion* all highlight the ‘majesty’ of conscience, and the subsequent wasting away of the ‘beautiful souls’ due to their innocent sacrifice of personal fulfillment for an immediate love of noble principles.³⁶ In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel considers the ‘beautiful soul’ to be best exemplified by the character Antigone, who defends the ‘immediacy’ of the ethical Spirit at the cost of her life. In his eyes, the beautiful souls ‘are...unalienated spirits transparent to themselves, stainless celestial figures that preserve in all their differences the undefiled innocence and harmony of their essential nature’ (PS §437, 261). Antigone embraces the notion of filial piety and takes it as her self-interest. While the beautiful soul enjoys true consistency in belief and action, Hegel considers the beautiful soul to be too refined for the everyday world. Hence, he believes it will vaporize into thin air and die because the world neither understands nor agree with its abstract unity. At the same time, the hard-hearted judge—a man of action who believes in a conscientious being-for-itself—comes to condemn the beautiful soul because of its abstract, impersonal traits. (Austen’s *Persuasion* best dramatizes this clash between the being-for-other and the being-for-itself as Wentworth challenges Anne’s decision). The two types of moral outlook are summarized by Stern: ‘one that insists on the validity of acting from one’s own desires and conscience, and another that insists that the only good deed is the deed done from purely abstract, universal motives’.³⁷ In the end, the beautiful soul resorts to dialogues and confession and reveals its noble motives. Hegel postulates that the hard-hearted judge will come round to see that its stiff-necked judgement/condemnation of the beautiful soul is erroneous and groundless: the beautiful soul has every reason to act in its noble way. Reconciliation between the two figures is marked by the profusion of ‘love’ and ‘forgiveness’. As the subject now possesses a concrete knowledge of itself, a concrete reconciliation with the Other (love/forgiveness), and a genuine identification with moral laws (‘the ‘I’ unites

³⁶ See Allen Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, 94-121.

³⁷ Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object*, 53.

with the universal essence'), Hegel believes it marks the coming of the absolute Spirit,

The word of reconciliation is the *objectively* existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself *qua universal* essence, in its opposition, in the pure knowledge of itself *qua* absolutely self-contained and exclusive *individuality*—a reciprocal recognition which is absolute Spirit (PS §670, 408).³⁸

Austen, Negativity and Lacan

If Hegel considers negation to be for a higher stage of existence—so much so that the subject can reach the Other and then the laws—and ends in an absolute, non-negating, positive union, Austen does not share this optimistic enlightenment ideal. To Austen, positive recognition occurs mostly on a very small-scale, personal level, often between two opposing but highly moral and conscientious subjects. In her novels, total improvement is shown to be almost impossible, and the subjects' reflection surprisingly shows traces of 'negative thinking' that anticipate twentieth century thought. Reflection often makes the subject realize that its 'Self' is a 'construct'—a product of (gothic, romantic) language, and the Other's influence. In this light, Austen's critical understanding of the *formation* of the subject is surprising modern: the human subject is Otherized by a culture-specific language (NA, SS), desire is often the effect of the Other (E,P). After the painful stage of awakening, Austen makes readers understand that even though some subjects are enlightened, the world refuses to confront the problem of lack in being and keeps pursuing ideological fulfillment/illusion (PP, P). The inevitable clash between the enlightened and the unenlightened groups sensitize readers to a pessimistic vision: the centrality of 'lack' of harmony, of love, or unity at social, class or interpersonal level. With this empathetic 'lack' of hope for reconciliation, Austen problematizes the ideals of progress in *both* 'conservative' (paternal) doctrines as well as 'liberal' romantic enlightened doctrines. Like Lacan, Austen's novels aim not at the establishment of new revolutionary discourses (that would be another set of totalizing discursive constructs). Instead, Austen's apparent ironic non-involvement endeavors to be a

³⁸ Here ends the anthropological, human-centered part of the *Phenomenology*, as well as our interest in Hegel's theory. In the third and fourth part of the book, Hegel proceeds to theorize on the possibility of a divine knowledge of religion/the world, which earns him a reputation of being a

guide to direct readers to create their own new discourses—which are supposed to be less oppressive, less domineering, more open or processual. In Austen's subtle negation of the positive, universal enlightenment, she has anticipated Lacan's drastic negation of Hegel's positive spirit. And a brief examination of Lacan's philosophy will be useful for us to understand Austen's 'negative vision' in the coming chapters.

In the twentieth century, Lacan employed and inverted the Hegelian dialectical methodology in order to focus singularly on 'negation'. He foregrounds the impossibility of the enlightenment ideal—reason, improvement—by heightening the negative teleology of 'chaos', 'lack' and 'void' in the center of being. Simply put, Lacan subverts the entire Hegelian project of reconciliation by depicting the final stage of recognition in the form of accepting lack, chaos and void, discarding the pursuit of illusory fullness, improvement or unity. Lacan is an anti-enlightenment thinker in the sense that the subject must know that enlightenment ideals—knowledge, unity, abundance—are false. In terms of knowledge, the subject will never know what is in the center of its being. On the question of unity/abundance, the subject will always be in lack (of knowledge, of unity, of fullness). Instead of cherishing a Hegelian dialectic between the individual and the Other, Lacan visualizes a dialectic between interiority and exteriority. The Lacanian subjectivity employs the Hegelian 'negation of negation' to end in ultimate negativity: the real me is a 'myth', a 'construct' in the process of deferral—the intimate is the extimate, the self is the other, the big Other is the Self, the extimate Self hates the Other, the center of the self is an unknowable void.

To explain this clearly, Lacan grounds his 'negative philosophy' in the ontological assumption that the human subject will always be 'in lack'. At the very first stage of infancy (1-6 months), the baby already lacks the primordial *jouissance* it enjoys in the womb. It feels the threat of this loss. As the mother is almost the world to an infant, the baby vaguely equates the world (a pre-symbolic chaotic reality, in Lacanian term, the Thing) with the mother. The baby believes that to control the world, to regain the lost fullness, is to please or possess the mother. Hence, Lacan explains why tragedies often dramatize human instinct in relation to

romantic idealist. As Austen's novels do not focus on these areas, it is not in our interest to go into Hegel's intricate argument on 'religion' or the 'absolute knowing'.

the desire for the Mother. To terminate loss, the subject risks everything to go back to the Mother ('the Sovereign Good, which is *das Ding*, which is the mother, is also the object of incest' S7 70). However, the Mother is precisely not the Thing, as Lacan elsewhere makes clear. Hence the subject can never really contain the threats of the chaotic reality even though it has gained the Mother. Further lack occurs as the baby evolves. The baby clings to some pleasurable '*object a*' (primordial maternal objects that can give a sense of fullness/fulfillment—such as breasts, voice, gaze). While the baby enjoys these pleasurable, fusional *object a*, the baby soon loses them as it weans and grows. The loss of these *object a* constitutes the 'ontological lack' in the subject, and prompts it to subsequently seek fullness in the imaginary and the Symbolic stage.

The rise of the mirror stage hides the infant's lack for a while, only to intensify it for the rest of its life. From 6 months onwards, the baby is capable of perceiving its unifying image in the mirror. Lacan openly states that the infant's self-recognition through the mirror is the beginning of a lifelong self-*misrecognition*. The baby still suffers from its ontological lack (of real *jouissance*, of object *a*), but the mirror gives a reflection to the subject to make it think it can be a unifying, 'full' creature. The infant mistakes/misrecognizes itself as a 'complete' subject basing on this 'image' (specular misrecognition) so as to hide its ontological anxiety (an infant-in-lack). Lacan believes that specular misrecognition ensures the rise of the ego (*moi*), it also guarantees the rise of a new 'structural lack'—the subject will forever need an other to see itself. Simply put, the mirror leads the baby to have an ego, but it also leads to the othering of the ego as the subject can only perceive its 'full self' through the other (a mirror in the wardrobe, or later on, an object, a car, a person in the signifying chain in which the subject uses it for mirroring function³⁹). The ego is forever related to the other; however, the subject only wants to use the other as a means to paradoxically deny its lack and mirror its fullness (i.e. narcissism). As a result, the self-other relationship in the Imaginary is always in an ambivalent turmoil. The other is essential, but the other must not upset 'my' delightful specular self-

³⁹ This story can best illustrate the idea of using a person for a mirroring function. Two girls from the same primary school sat down and talked. The beautiful young lady said to the other, 'When I grow up, I will invite you to be my bridesmaid.' The young lady asked, 'Why?' The beautiful young lady replied, 'Because you look so ugly! If you become my bridesmaid, everyone will say I am beautiful'.

image. Lacan notes that aggressivity will occur if it does. The ego will force the other to keep its place. (As the Imaginary is essentially a narcissistic fantasy zone for the subject to see whatever it wants to see, Žižek points out that 'imaginary fantasy' actually forms the roots of undemocracy in the human psyche. The ego must dominate over others as it takes a leading role in imaginary conversation or dreams).

The subject is forced to confront its lack in the face of the father. From 18 months onwards, the father's intrusive voice marks the infant's dawning of oedipalization. The child is castrated by the Law of the father and enters into the Symbolic. The lack of means for self-expression is now replaced by an alien system of symbolic representation. However, Lacan points out that the Symbolic stage will only install a new form of 'lack' in the subject's constitution. The father's symbolic castration will leave a feeling of inadequacy, an eternal lack of potency on the part of the subject. In addition, the subject (mis)recognizes that reality can be totalized by symbols with a neat, paternal linguistic ordering of reality. The emergence of the unifying Subject—the 'I' in language—endeavors to oust the helpless, ontological lack (of mother, of *object a*, of enjoyment) in the pre-symbolic state. But language can actually only introduce a painful, double misrecognition on the part of the subject: first, the symbolic does not cure the subject of its ontological lack of fullness. It merely creates another order to hide and displace this loss (e.g. music/CDs/operas for the search of the full Voice). Second, language is in itself a 'lack'. For example, the word 'orange' is not related to the signified (the round thing on the table). While it pursues the signified, it is in itself a set of empty arbitrary floating signifiers orbiting according to its own laws, and will forever lack the 'fullness' of the signified. Lacan concludes that the void of language (a lack of representational fullness), and the void of the subject (a lack of ontological fullness) will only result in a tragic pursuit. Trapped by symbols, the subject's search for fullness in the symbolic order can only be a futile undertaking.

For Lacan, the tendency to deny lack is a genuine block on social or personal liberation. For example, 'the master' invents his own 'full-language' (system, theory, procedures, plans), and refuses to see the Real chaotic order. The master believes himself to be no longer lacking, and uses his fullness (knowledge, system, theory) only to impose on and tyrannize over the Other. The 'hysterical subject' refuses to be

in the state of lack, and as a way of ‘confirming’ the possibility of fullness, she keeps fantasizing about a ‘total discourse’, worships a subject (the master), and declares that the master is exempt from any kind of inadequacy. Hence, Lacan openly declares that the psychoanalytic truth is to accept ‘lack’ (disunity, chaos, negativity, failure of knowledge, plan) in the center of life. With this in mind, Lacan is against the Hegelian idea of sublation. In *Écrits*, he aligns Hegel with the philosophical tradition’s love for autonomy and a unifying subject. He appreciates Hegel’s principle of negation, but he says that Hegel’s

philosophy grasps negativity only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, as one of its premises, links to the *méconnaissances* that constitutes the ego, the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself. (E 6)

In ‘Pleasure and Reality’, Lacan refutes Hegel and Freud’s plan of improvement for the naïve subject. Hegel postulates that the naïve subject will eventually relinquish its pleasure-seeking naïve egoism, and be improved by a ‘law’. In less than a hundred years, Freud, using a very different approach, names the same naïve pleasure-seeking egoism as *id*. He suggests that *id* upholds the ‘pleasure principle’, and will be controlled by the ‘reality principle’. Eventually, the reality principle is, according to Freud, the way in which the subject seeks a ‘lawful’ being. Lacan brings in Hegel in the outline of his seminar, and openly challenges Hegel’s assumption that Faustian egoism must be negated by a law. Instead, he argues that transgressive pleasure—like the (symbolic) murder of the father—is good (‘it is instead something worthy of our praise...since it is at the origin of a higher complexity, something to which the realm of civilization owes its development’ S7 6). Instead of subjecting pleasure to a law (which, according to Lacan, generates so many pathological subjects), he argues that pleasure is positive. Pleasure is closer to the Real (fullness, or the unknowable void). Instead of putting his faith in the Freudian reality principle, Lacan regards it as but another facet of the pleasure principle. He openly refutes the Freudian differentiation and suggests that there is no difference between fact and fiction, between reality and fantasy. In his own words, ‘Reality is precarious’ (S7 30), ‘[i]n the coupling of pleasure principle and reality principle, the reality principle might seem to be a prolongation or an application of the pleasure principle’ (S7 21). The reason why Lacan says this is due to a belief that

pleasure is what governs the human psyche. Instead of reading reality or law in an objective way, the subject is infused with a love of pleasure. Pleasure 'directs man in his behavior without his knowledge...[to seek what]...gives him pleasure' (S7 12). Lacan concedes that the reality principle takes place at the 'level of thought'. However, as 'thought' is linked to words, and words are always already filtered by a desire for pleasure, the subject's (supposedly realistic) 'identity of perception' and 'identity of thought' are always linked to its fantasy or 'anticipated pleasure'. As a result, Lacan implies that the traditional notion ('improvement=be schooled by reality or a law') is invalid because the difference between law and fantasy, fact and fiction is thin, and no subject's perception can be completely free from fantasy or pleasure-seeking. In the end, Lacan subtly hints that 'improvement' is but a sleight of hand, substituting one type of pleasure with a less punishable pleasure. The fantasy of *jouissance* remains unchanged.

Hegel suggests that the egoistic subject will switch to a relatively objective but pleasurable 'law of the heart' to deal with the world, and end up in a narcissistic 'frenzy of self-conceit'. Lacan does not directly mention Hegel in his talk on courtly love, but his study of the courtly poet is grounded on Hegel's ideas: the troubadour enacts the pleasurable law of the heart and frenzy. Hegel sympathizes with the heart-ruled subject and says its problem lies in the confusion of a personal, moral law with a universal choice. For example, the sentimental subject loves Nature/a woman, and comes to believe that the whole world must endorse its preference. Lacan is less lenient to the heart-ruled subject. He regards the troubadour's 'subjective', 'moral' love as completely inauthentic, structured by language—so much so that his 'heart' is a product of the Other. The troubadour's 'personal' love is actually an 'impersonal', linguistic-love, signifying the void of Being.

To explain this clearly, the troubadour represents to Lacan a subject who has undergone the Symbolic stage. To seek fullness, the subject resorts to an 'empty play of signifiers' in language. The troubadour voices his feelings through a set of stereotyped (Otherized) expressions—and (mis)recognizes this 'courtly love discourse' as original and substantial. Lacan hints that the subject's sentiment is inauthentic, and the love-object is, furthermore, nothing more than a symbol. The

lady-in-question is 'never characterized for any of her concrete virtues, for her wisdom, her prudence'. In fact, the lady doesn't even have a name. The lady

is also frequently referred to with the masculine term...—this Lady is presented with depersonalized characteristics. As a result, writers have noted that all the poets seem to be addressing the same person. (S7 149).

Critics have argued that the lady may be a displacement of religious or feudal worship, but Lacan says this is not the point. The point is that the subject is totally constructed by language, to such an extent that its feelings are Other-oriented, and the love object is essentially a traditional, predetermined choice. The lady is always married, inaccessible. She is a 'void' to the troubadour (not comprehensible, not attainable), and only occupies a 'symbolic function' for him. To seek this 'symbolic lady', the poet resorts to more (empty) symbolic games to 'play around' with signifiers (stereotyped language, stereotyped sentiments) (S7 150). In the pleasurable law of the heart, Lacan notes that there is nothing hearty about its laws, or poetic sentiments. The most personal, sentimental expression turns out to be the most impersonal, the most desired object turns out to be a void, and a signifying game. The troubadour merely fills himself up with a set of empty expressions (hence he himself is also reduced to a void) in order to get closer to an inaccessible lady who is always barred from him. With one void chasing another void, Lacan concludes that the love game cannot end in a positive outcome.

Hegel notices that the heart-ruled subject is essentially narcissistic in its self-conceit and frenzy. In the tradition of courtly poems, Lacan specifically notes that the language game is sought for its narcissistic function: 'the element of idealizing exaltation that is expressly sought out in the ideology of courtly love has certainly been demonstrated; it is fundamentally narcissistic in character' (S7 151). Simply put, the exalted language does not bear any actual reference to reality (the lady-in-question is essentially falsely represented), nor does it bring the subject any genuine fulfillment (union with the lady). In that regard, the only function that language has is the 'mirroring function'. The words come back to the troubadour to form a gratifying image of himself: i.e. he is a warm lover, and a true lover of great virtues—represented by the lady. This image is essentially false but flattering, for his warm feelings come from a borrowed tradition. And through that tradition, the poet

has greatly moralized the lady—for one very simple reason: the more idealized the lady, the greater a lover of virtue he (mis)recognizes himself to be. Lacan particularly highlights the fact that the narrated lady is in fact understood or revealed by the poet to be truly cruel and arbitrary (like a tigress, ‘as arbitrary as possible in the tests she imposes on her servant’ S7 150). Hence, it is clear that the poet wants to elevate her not for the sake of truth, but for the sake of love/self-love. In terms of content, Lacan points out that this love/language game is ascetic in nature (physical contact is banned). But this language is also extremely enticing because of its deferral, the ‘technique of holding back, of suspension’ (S7 152). Due to the deferring nature of this language (no actual reference to reality, no corresponding result/union), every sign of the Other—the lady’s hand, smile—is allowed to be freely eroticized by the subject and gives narcissistic gratification to the ego. Reality is one thing (the lady may smile at many people), but the poet deliberately misreads the sign (she is a *goddess* that smiles at *me*). The ‘idealizing cult of feminine object’ carries, thus, the process of symbolic and specular misrecognition: the lady is signified to be a virtuous goddess, and I ‘see’ that she favors *me*. To Lacan, it is ‘through these kinds of revivals that one is able to understand what the function of signifier means’ (S7 153). The subject may perceive a different reality, but it will cling to its fantasy, and fanatically clutch to its self-conceit, or its narcissistic reading of the lady and the self. The perception of reality is essentially distorted. The only gain on the part of the subject lies in its having a pleasurable, narcissistic mirroring of the (ideal) self.

Hegel suggests that the master endeavors to be strong and independent. Its downfall is caused by its disrespect towards the Other: inadequate recognition leads to feelings of ennui. To Lacan, it is not inadequate recognition that causes the problem, but the master’s desire to construct a unifying reading of reality. It leads the master to blindness—first to himself, then to others. Unlike the Hegelian master (a historical figure that controls the apparatus of production), the Lacanian master is an agent who authorizes discursive production. The master does not deal with material things, it just ‘quilts’ all things with the invention of one master-symbol (e.g. Marx’s quilting of world history with the idea of ‘class’). Suddenly everything becomes

readable and falls into place.⁴⁰ Playing on the homophony between *maître* and *m'être* (S20 33), Lacan usually links the master to the totalizing discourse of philosophy and ontology. The master discourse valorizes a set of signifiers that construct meaning and hierarchize values in a civilization. For example, things are judged to carry good/bad connotations according to the notion of 'freedom, equality' in a democratic society, or 'proletariat, class struggles' in a communist country. The master discourse aims at a 'correct', 'accurate' analysis of reality, hence the master believes that he must exclude fantasy in order to achieve accuracy. However, the development of things turns out to be different: the master is actually the 'inventor' of fantasy while he blindly insists on its 'authentic' theories.

Lacan's inversion of the master's 'rational' authority and fantasy can be explained in this way: first of all, with the master's 'accurate' analysis, chaotic reality is reduced to a neat, totalizing phenomenon. The master uses his dominant signifier (S_1) to produce knowledge and perspectives, to *enslave* all other knowledges, other signifiers (S_2 is like the 'slave'). In the context of Marx, 'class' is the encompassing S_1 signifier that totalizes everything, and enslaves all categories of gender, age, and individualistic differences. Secondly, in this process, the S_1 always goes beyond the realm of science/reason and becomes absolutized/mythic (like the master in the colonial master-slave situation). A cluster of S_1 functions as 'symbols of excess' to terrorize and govern all other signifiers. For example, as 'Class' becomes a symbol of excess, to be differentiated from other 'ordinary' signifiers, it enjoys a mythic authority that can go beyond reason. In some Marxist countries, 'Class' is not only a word, it has a punitive power that can end in very distressing political persecution—especially to dissenting intellectuals or wealthy aristocrats. Thirdly, the master, who aims at excluding fantasy, ends up becoming a man with a legendary status: a fantasmal, mysterious man. Having constructed certain egalitarian master signifiers accessible to the public, the master now enjoys an exclusive status, a 'fantasmatic formation' and control of discursive production⁴¹. His absolute ascendance has made the world equate the master with fantasmal fullness. And the master becomes blind to its defense of *a* (fantasy) in the name of scientific or

⁴⁰ Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects" in *Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious*, 78.

⁴¹ Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects" in *Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious*, ed. Žižek, 75.

analytical accuracy. Mark Bracher's words best explain this situation: the 'exclusion of [fantasy] makes the discourse of the master completely blind to its foundation: that is, its speaker is totally unaware of the reason for promulgating its master signifiers—namely, of the lack of being, or cause of desire, that the master signifier attempts to plaster over'.⁴² In short, the whole point of the master discourse is that it uses language to hide the ontological lack, to totalize chaos/confusion in the Real world. Hence, in the name of rejecting fantasy, the master discourse is actually a fantasmal discourse which tries to impose an absolute (discursive) order where there should be differences, or disorder. However, the master, with its self-identical, autonomous ego, cannot see his theory, his 'truth' is the result of his *a* (fantasy) to hide the genuine 'truth'—the 'lack', the void, the difference and the disunity in the center of being.

Unlike traditional philosophers' distrust of fantasy, Lacan believes that genuine improvement begins with the *a*, the fantasy. By studying what is fantasmal, excessive in the master discourse, by unveiling what the master discourse has left unsaid/repressed in the subject, the subject can come to destabilize the master signifier, to question the hegemonic, enslaving *S*₁. However, master signifiers are fundamentally not removable. One can democratize master signifiers ('truth', 'justice', 'class'), but one cannot delete them. Žižek's warning is worth noting:

There is no reason to be dismissive of the discourse of the master, to identify it too hastily with "authoritarian repression": the master's gesture is the founding gesture of every social link.⁴³

Without master signifiers, there can only be social disintegration or perceptual confusion.

Hegel postulates that interpersonal, social harmony can be accomplished through love. To Lacan, social harmony cannot be founded through love—precisely because there is no love to be found. In the chapter 'Love of one's neighbor', Lacan explains the difficulty of loving the neighbor because of the problem of 'extimacy'. 'Extimacy' refers to the fact that the interior is the exterior, the intimate self is actually an external, foreign entity. To explain this concept more clearly, the core of

⁴² Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher and Alcorn, 121.

the subject's being, the 'real self' has long become an unknowable real Thing. Hence, the functioning of the subject is centered and structured around the Other: first, by means of the Symbolic Other (language) due to oedipalization; second, by means of the social Other (people) through contact, comparison and competition. As long as the subject valorizes the law of the signifier in its contact with other people, it upholds a 'principle of peace'⁴⁴—for the law of the signifier allows symbolic exchange, understanding, displacement, substitution to take place. For example, a subject's initial contact with the Other often means two people sitting down together discussing, translating, comparing similar or different concepts. Thus, Miller notices that there is a kind of 'democracy, an equality, a community, a principle of peace' (ibid). However, the closer people get to the center of being, the more problematic it will be.

As friendship deepens, increasing intimacy means a regressive journey to approach the subject's personal, Imaginary world. And once the subject valorizes the specular politics of the mirror stage (to measure, judge, establish its self-identity through the other's reflection), we will only find 'war' (ibid). The subject will force the Other to occupy the mirroring function of the 'other', and force this 'other' to foreground its narcissistic unity. In other words, the Imaginary is not a democratic zone, but a narcissistic 'stage' for the display of the subject's unity and identity. To gain a sense of identity, no matter how educated a person is, s/he must always turn to the mirror (but not the Symbolic), i.e. either to a mirror on the wall, or to a 'selected group' of people (the other) for the construction of a unifying image. This selected group of people is normally the closest to the subject. In short, they are the neighbors, the people next to you (i.e. colleagues, flatmates, friends, brothers and sisters—which explains why sibling rivalry can never be stamped out). As the self valorizes the politics of specularity (seeing the self through the other to give the self a superior recognition), no democracy is possible. Thus Miller says, '[N]o decision, no will, no amount of reasoning is sufficient to wipe out' the war between the self and the neighbor (ibid). To see the neighbor means to judge their shortcomings and to posit the subject's superiority. In this regard, the *antagonistic-fusional*

⁴³ Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects", 77.

⁴⁴ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher and Alcorn, 79.

relationality between the self and the other means that the subject can no longer detach itself from the neighbor (hence the obsession, the burning desire to peep, know, compare, criticize, condemn what the others are doing). However, love is singularly absent due to specular narcissism.

The next move on the part of the subject further denotes how the subject regresses from the imaginary to engage with the Real stage as it searches for fulfillment. We must remember the subject's ultimate desire is to re-possess the primordial Real *jouissance*—a state of immense happiness as well as immense chaos. As the subject grows, it experiences its ontological lack at all times. Through substitution and displacement, the subject seeks fulfillment in the symbolic and hunts for objects or people (cars, money, love, body) in the signifying chain, hoping that once it possesses the desired object, it can regain the lost *object a*, the Real *jouissance*. (Due to the fact that the *object a* is essentially an inaccessible, lost Thing, Lacan postulates that the subject is forever trapped in the Symbolic game of desire and hunting, but with no hope of getting genuine satisfaction). As the subject seeks pleasure and cannot find it, the neighbor's laughter greatly intrigues the subject. The subject cannot understand why the neighbor can be so happy; as a result, the neighbor's joy is attributed by the subject to the 'Real in the Symbolic'. It is like the real Thing (the real orange) in the center of language, capable of being perceived, but is essentially beyond the confines of the representational system (language). Yes, the neighbor is in the social world, but it seems to have a secret access to some 'real *jouissance*'. I can understand the neighbor, but I cannot understand its enjoyment. As the Real *jouissance* is disgustingly chaotic, the subject justifies its attack on the neighbor on the ground that the neighbor is always irritable and irrational (for anything related to the 'Real order' must be unknowable, disorderly, beyond comprehension). The neighbor's music is cacophonous and loud. The neighbor's food is terrible and smelly. On the other hand, the real *jouissance* manifests an enviable, fusional happiness. Hence, the subject also longs for the neighbor's fascinating enjoyment. Given the antagonistic-fusional relationality between the neighbor and the self, the subject sees the other's having something it does not have as losing the edge, upsetting its superiority, being robbed. As a result, the subject declares that the neighbor's enjoyment is 'a theft of the subject's own enjoyment'. Such paradoxical

ambivalence (hating the ‘lowly’ pleasures of the neighbor and desiring its enjoyment) can only be clarified in this way. Žižek gives the example of how one always regards the neighbor’s real *jouissance*—smelly food, exotic decor—as disgusting or chaotic, and ponders on the reason why s/he can enjoy such food/taste with great pleasure. However, the subject’s longing for real *jouissance* also makes it wonder whether it is missing something or not. As the subject always wants to suppress the other/neighbor for a narcissistic (advantageous) comparison, seeing the neighbor so elated, so absorbed in its enjoyment, the subject feels deprived—without *jouissance*, without narcissistic gratification. Hence, Lacan and Miller describe the situation in which the subject feels the neighbor has stolen its enjoyment. Love is almost impossible in the social scene.

One would have to know how to confront the fact that my neighbor’s *jouissance*, his harmful, malignant *jouissance*, is that which poses a problem for my love. (Lacan ‘Love of one’s neighbor’ S7 187)

What is the cause for our hatred of [the Other], for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment of the Other...The question of tolerance or intolerance is not at all concerned with the subject of science or human rights. It is located on the level of the tolerance or intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment.⁴⁵

If we think of Mrs Bennet’s hatred of the Other’s success, regarding it as an achievement stolen from her, or accomplished at her expense, the whole situation would be clearer. She is angered by people’s joy and considers it as a theft of her enjoyment. At the end of the seminar, Lacan suggests that the subject cannot put up with the neighbor’s (disgusting or enviable) enjoyment because it cannot put up with the Real *jouissance*, and the neighbor’s taking a place in this jovial/disgusting realm. And from this, Lacan deduces that the subject’s failure to put up with anyone in the Real *jouissance* means the subject cannot put up with the ‘real me’ (for the real me longs for this *jouissance*).

What is more of a neighbor to me than this heart within which is that of my *jouissance* and which I don’t dare go near? For as soon as I go near it, as *Civilization and Its Discontents* makes clear, there rises up the unfathomable aggressivity from which I flee, that I turn against me, and which in the very place of the vanished Law adds its weight

⁴⁵ Miller, “Extimité”, 81.

to that which prevents me from crossing a certain frontier at the limit of the Thing. (S7 186)

As the subject attacks the neighbor, its (presumed Real) *jouissance*, Lacan makes the final simple equation and concludes that the rejection of the neighbor means the rejection of the Real 'me', the hatred of the neighbor's *jouissance* is the fear of one's own *jouissance*. The 'extimacy' of the self is neatly foregrounded by the dialectic of the interiority and exteriority: the self is constructed by the other, the negation of the neighbor is the negation of the (Real) self.

In the Hegelian context, there is one subject—the beautiful soul—who is not afraid of negation. Through conscientious (self-)negation, the beautiful soul willingly embraces a noble ideal. Lacan specifically points out that the desperate enactment of the altruistic good at the expense of selfhood will lead to tragedy, instead of improvement. He devotes several chapters to anatomize the Hegelian beautiful soul and the problem of the moral subject in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. He uses Hegel's example—Antigone—in elucidating the 'deathliness' of this state of being. Hegel says the beautiful soul will vaporize into thin air due to its 'celestial' moral immediacy. Lacan agrees with the beautiful soul's tendency to die, but questions the idea of 'moral immediacy'. To him, this 'immediacy' is totally Otherized and self-alienating. The beautiful soul has an 'ethical' beauty because she defends her desire, but her desire is 'the desire of the Other': a big, impersonal Other/Law that negates and voids the subject of its self. Prior to her natural death, Antigone has already died a 'second death'—for she has become 'inhuman' (S7 263), incapable of feeling fear or pity (S7 258). Lacan argues that Antigone's second death is purely related to language, 'by virtue of the signifier in its most radical form' (S7 295). Antigone does not relate her feelings to people (e.g. her brother) with reference to his deed/reality (which she knows to be criminal in nature, and indefensible). She relates herself to him through an 'ineffaceable' signifier—filial love. And that is where the moral subject builds her 'unshakeable, unyielding' position (S7 279).

Lacan considers this total identification with the signifier to be the essence of tragic action. In Antigone's defiance of Creon's law, the tragic element lies in the fact that Antigone desires to find in language more than a (floating) system of signifiers. She wants to seek the symbolic *jouissance* in language—the absolute

Thing-without-lack embodied in the moral discourse ('the Good', 'Piety', 'Love'). In Lacanian formula, it is represented as (A), unwritten, unrepresentable.

[T]he limit in question is one on which she establishes herself, a place where she feels herself to be unassailable...These are no longer laws, but a certain legality which is a consequence of the laws of the gods that are said to be...."unwritten." ...Involved here is an invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else' (S7 278)

Even though this absolute ideal is in the core of moral discourses, it is the excess-in-language and is not representable. And whoever seeks this symbolic *jouissance* can only find misfortune awaiting him/her—for anything related to the absolute order of *jouissance* must transgress people's ideas of normativity, and will result in isolation, misunderstanding, attack and loneliness. Lacan suggests that the beautiful soul's 'beauty' lies in the subject's courage to seek this *jouissance*, though she knowingly understands this true Good will lead her to death. This is the 'blinding' effect of Antigone's beauty. The beautiful soul vaporizes into thin air not because of her abstract quality, but because of her attempt to go beyond signifying laws, and approach the absolute in the core of language. In the Lacanian context, the moment the subject goes near to the absolute, it can only find a powerful void—for the absolute is nonsymbolizable, nonrepresentable. It is not meaningless, but it is certainly incomprehensible to the mind (e.g. catastrophic accidents, ecstatic feelings). The absolute drives the subject to a traumatic or pleasurable experience to feel a desire for death, where the subject can go beyond the flux of life and escape to the realm of excessive *jouissance*. In Lacan's own words, '[Antigone] pushes to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire' (S7 282). In short, Lacan regards the ultimate project of improvement—the embrace of the absolute, noble ideal—as leading not to life, but to an unyielding position to defend an absolute void, and can only end in a beautiful death.

Lacan's philosophy carries the enlightenment spirit and method—for example, in his challenge of authority (Freud or Hegel), and in his use of systematic, (totalizing) mathematical formula for the representation of the psychological state (e.g. $\text{fantasy} = S \diamond a$, fantasy means that the subject is in search of the object *a*, the lost cause of its desire). However, Lacan's thought is anti-enlightenment in character as he

valorizes lack and non-improvement as the ultimate center of human subjectivity. The adult is lured to play the game of deferral: it believes its active quest can end in fulfillment and improvement; however, the subject's multiple efforts to wipe out the ontological lack only point towards a heightened awareness of *irreconcilable* lack, being as *ex nihilo*, and death. The Symbolic murders the self ('the Symbolic is the murder of the thing' E 104) and replaces it with an alien system of the sign. The imaginary realm—with a longing for narcissistic and fantasmal sovereignty—directs the self to misrecognize its 'holeness' as wholeness, and harbor an aggressive attitude towards the neighbor. Meanwhile, in the face of catastrophe or sublime scenery, the momentary return of the Real order can only shock the subject into realizing the falsehood of all orderly perceptions, and sensitize it to understand the trauma of chaos.

To Lacan, the only way towards improvement is to admit that there is no possibility of attaining unity. Instead, one should seek the 'truth' in analytical discourse. Hence he considers psychoanalysis to be an 'ethical' enterprise. The subject is asked to face the 'truth' of being: to see the inauthenticity/Otherness of the Self, to perceive the circularity of objects (whose attempt is to replace the lost *object a*), to unveil the 'senseless' functioning of the signifier that hides lack from the subject, and alienates the subject from its 'real' self. During this process, the subject is asked to confront its own lack, its dependency on the master's hegemonic construction of reality to wipe out lack. The analyst is silent—Lacan is seriously against the Freudian way of giving active suggestions or dream interpretation. In turn, the subject is invited to listen back to its own words, to understand the nature of its (Otherized) desire, to interpret its own intentional or unintentional meaning. The analyst merely plays on the ambiguity of the subject's speech to highlight its multiple meanings, and send back the message to the subject in a new, inverted form. For Lacan, the analytical discourse is done through 1) listening, 2) reading the subject's discourse as 'text'. Hence, it refuses to understand the meaning of the subject, and merely plays with the literal meaning of the subject's words and refuses to interpret *for* the subject. 3) The analytical discourse interrupts the speech of the subject by punctuation. By giving stress to some unexpected words, asking questions or making associations, the analyst wants to subvert the subject's 'normative'

perspectives. The analyst can use different intonation in different contexts to create different meanings and destabilize the subject's fixed world. Lacan uses this pun as an example: *Tu es ma mère* (you are my mother), *tuer ma mère* (to kill my mother). To repeat the sentence to the subject with a change of stress, with shocking associations can retroactively alter the intended meaning of the subject's speech. Hence, the analyst's goal is to let the subject discover 1) it has said more than it intended, 2) meaning is not fixated and one speech can have multiple meanings, 3) by making various associations with dreams or personal history, the subject is the only authentic interpreter able to decode its own speech, 4) the subject hears back its own message in a shocking, inverted form so as to reflect on its own desire; and 5) the analyst's technique is not to do good or to heal people, not to unmask meaning for the subject, but to disrupt meaning. As modern people can make their own psychoanalytic interpretation (and sometimes predict/calculate the analysts' response to their dreams), Lacan decides that the Freudian way can no longer work. Instead, ambush is the strategy of the day: the subject should not have any preparation of what s/he is to say, the moment the analyst senses that the subject has said something important, the session would end—to annoy the subject, to shock it and force it to explore the meaning by itself, to resist the analyst, to overthrow authority, to understand the traumatic reality that what is ultimately important cannot be spoken/communicated to the Other.

At the end, the Lacanian 'truth' is a dialectical thing in psychoanalysis—the analyst leads the subject to speak about its own desire, to know its desire cannot be spoken (a void), to experience a change of subject-position and dethrone the analyst. If the subject can make a full speech (talk to another person about its own desire), understand its 'subjective destitution' (lack), the psychoanalytic process would be complete⁴⁶. As a full speech involves the subject's seeing the enigmatic truth of its desire, its Otherness, and recognizing the ways of language and the master, it is a

⁴⁶ There are two common types of pathological speeches: the first type—the subject speaks about the self without talking to others, i.e. it judges others without understanding the others, and compulsively talks on or critiques others by distorting their meaning according to their own ideas. (In short, narcissistic imposition). The second type—the subject speaks to others without speaking to the self, i.e. it subscribes to the voice/beliefs/commercials of the Other without heeding one's own preference. The subject murders the self and yields in the face of power/authority/pressure/pop idols (In short, Otherized self-emptying). Hence, Lacan thinks if a person can speak to the Other about the (Otherized) self, psychoanalysis would have completed its task.

‘true’ speech that can destroy the illusion of autonomy, the falsity of imaginary sovereignty, its desire to challenge everybody to assert its unity/superiority, its habitual surrender to the master or propagandistic discourse. Due to the fact that the subject’s (skewed) self-interpretation can never guarantee a simple development, in the Lacanian context, ‘truth’ has no univocal definition and is particular to individual subjects under multiple, changing circumstances.

In a strange way, Austen’s novels anticipate Lacan’s twentieth century analytical discourse. Austen’s passionless, self-effacing silence and detached narration have invited attacks from a Rousseauistic point of view, but they are invaluable resources for readers. In her stories, readers can re-read her non-involvement with varying interpretations (and self-examination). Her ambiguous attitude forces readers to decode her texts with multiple possibilities, and reflect on different interpretations. As readers give unusual emphasis to specific words or passages and try to argue that Austen is for (or against) Henry Tilney, Marianne Dashwood, Charlotte Lucas, Mary Crawford (i.e. whether Austen is—or is not—a feminist, a secretive romantic, or a sympathetic pragmatist), readers sometimes end up in a journey of unexpected self-examination, and discover that they argue in this way because they are a supporter of certain beliefs. While readers perceive their own or other critics’ strong response to the fate of Lydia Bennet, Harriet Smith, Mary Crawford, Marianne or Elinor Dashwood, they can see the source of discontent lies in their values being challenged by the text’s discursive design. As Austen offers no clear explanation on her stance, this textual ambiguity (for example, maybe one is allowed to admire or hate Mary Crawford or Henry Tilney at the same time) bears close affinity to Lacan’s statement—that the analyst’s intent should not be known. Readers are led to confront an enigmatic ‘X’, to discover the mystery of the Other—the message of the text—which turns out to be the discovery and reconstruction of one’s own desire, the story of one’s own.

In addition to her detached mode of presentation, Austen’s deployment of free indirect discourse always penetrates/challenges the social unconscious of her times. This move is not unlike a Lacanian gesture to invite the readers to ‘punctuate’ a text. In the context of Lacan, to punctuate a text is to ask the listener to produce its own ‘retroactive meaning’, and therefore, to destroy the illusion of a fixed meaning of an

utterance. For example, a mother can determine the meaning of her baby's scream (articulating hunger, tiredness etc). And an analyst can also 'by changing the punctuation' renew or upset the fixed meaning that the analysand has 'attributed to his own speech' (E 99). (In Lacan's words, 'the sender receives his own message from the receiver.' E 99) As the free indirect discourse blends various forms of narrative authority and perspectives and throws them all into open question, Austen invites readers to produce their own punctuation to retroactively determine the surface-meaning of her texts or interpret the embedded message within. For instance, Austen's famous opening line in *Pride and Prejudice*—'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (3)—is a classic example that invites the reader to renew/upset the surface-meaning of Austen's text. In my view, this sentence performs the role of blending a pseudo-objective truism, social critique and unreliable narration. It affirms/ironizes the 'objective' matrimonial truth/myth of her times (a rich man *must* need a wife), names/satirizes the mothers' anxiety to commodify their daughters (Mrs Bennet, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs Long, Mrs Lucas all believe a rich man must need a wife—their daughter). It also describes/ridicules the fetishistic linkage between the two most powerful phallic signifiers in the society—men and money (a rich *man* must need a wife). And this statement can also reveal or indict class snobbery (only the *rich*—not the poor—man must need a wife).

Her use of irony also helps disrupt reader consciousness. With irony, the text, just as Lacan says, always speaks more than it intends. Irony often masks the message and multiplies its meaning and 'refuses' to understand what it says, or takes sides. Hence, irony is reader-oriented, it always 'depends on its audience to detect and complete meanings extending beyond the literal sense of the language. Austen's habitual irony distances her from appearances and behavior in her society, but it unites her with her readers by drawing us into a conspiracy of intellect'.⁴⁷ Here, from *Persuasion*, is one typical example of her irony:

Few women could think more of their personal appearances than [Sir Walter] did; nor could the valet of any new made lord be more delighted with the place he held in society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir

⁴⁷ Robert M. Polhemus, "Jane Austen's Comedy" in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. David Grey, 66.

Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion. (36)

At first this appears to be just a piece of rather obvious irony directed against the vanity of a man. But on second thought there is a deeper meaning. The mirroring of the self (Sir Walter is the 'constant object' of his respect) not only denotes the presence of a narcissistic love, but also highlights Sir Walter's politics of identity. Sir Walter is ironically blind to his fantasy (fullness, beauty), and he chooses to be blind to his reality (poverty), which makes his self-recognition turns out to be a game of self-misrecognition. His concern with the mirror makes him vain and he boycotts people with plain faces (including his own daughter). His concern with the social mirror—how a baronet will appear in the eyes of the world—leads him to extravagant habits, frivolity, and bankruptcy. And these two mirrors (appearance and baronetcy) make him despise/oppress everyone who is lesser than himself. In turn, the 'blessing' of beauty and a baronetcy on a weak mind like Sir Walter turns out to be a plague to the gentry class and accelerates its decline. Instead of seeing Austen as a firm believer in intact gentry estates, we may as well say Austen loves to critique/ironize the self-complacency of the aristocratic class, and has no nostalgic regret in the fall of the mirror, the destruction of the corrupted gentry class. As irony changes its meanings with individual interpreter, Austen's ironic vision constructs a 'free' space for her readers to destabilize, detotalize the text—for the readers' freedom to project meaning is protected by the text's ambiguity. In the words of A.J.Cascardi, 'Irony comes to afford a critical perspective on the distance'. It has its 'claims of representation', but it also gives allowance to 'our tendency to project' and enjoy 'a sphere of...freedom'.⁴⁸

With Austen's narrative techniques, readers are led to witness what Lacan calls the 'indirection of language'. To Lacan, the indirect language is by nature intriguing: 'That in which one must be interested is the point of knowing why she wished precisely that the other person understand that, and why she did not say it to him clearly, but by allusion...If you understand, you are wrong' (S3 60). And this indirectness can only destroy the unity of the text by pinpointing the role of the Other in constituting meaning. In the case of Austen, her language is constantly

⁴⁸ A.J. Cascardi, "Totality and the Novel" *NLH* 23 (1992), 609.

multivalent, her text ‘never has a single meaning, the word a single usage’. Every text has ‘always a beyond, supports several functions, envelops several meanings. Behind what a discourse says, there is what it means to say, and behind what it means to say, there is yet another mean-to-say, and none of it will ever be exhausted’ (S1 267). Thus, Shoshana Felman highlights the special status of literary narratives in achieving what discourses may not do,

Since irony precisely consists in dragging authority as such into a scene which it cannot master, of which it is not aware and which, for that very reason is the scene of its self-deconstruction, literature, by virtue of its ironic force, fundamentally deconstructs the fantasy of authority in the same way, and for the same reasons, that psychoanalysis deconstructs the authority of the fantasy.⁴⁹

In a very Lacanian way, Austen’s novels aim neither at healing the maladies of her societies, producing any absolute ideal nor at perfecting everybody; in fact, readers have to accept the impossibility of improvement, or total reconciliation. In her stories, the larger (patriarchal) society often remains dark, snobbish, unimproved; however, in the process, the readers’ subject-positions are often changed. Readers learn to undertake self-reflection (like the Austenian subjects), disidentify with the patriarchs/matriarchs, question the enlightenment ideals, or interpret their own desires in response to the text. As the texts problematizes a positive closure, Austen’s stories curb the human tendency to wipe out lack by worshipping unrealistic enjoyment, or longing for a fantasmal, totalizing social renewal.

Austen, Cynical Misrecognition and Žizek

While Austen holds a negative view of social enlightenment, all her novels celebrate a joyful return to embrace the existing social, institutional, ideological master-practices. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Austenian enlightened subjects—after undergoing the process of awakening—always happily, and willingly re-join the unenlightened gentry class. The Austenian subjects (like Lizzy or Henry Tilney) may vigorously distrust the system or paternal values, yet, in the final analysis, they insist on reconciling with them—even if the reconciliation is superficial. It is in this sense that Austen’s novels manifest what Žizek calls the spirit of ‘cynical misrecognition’. Reason and critique are dialectically sublated by the onset of

⁴⁹ Shoshana Felman, “To Open the Question” *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), 8.

‘cynical reason’—which is an ‘enlightened false consciousness’. In turn, the cynical attitude in the modern society allows the subject to criticize ideology, allows ideology to lay its cards on the table, reveal the secret of its functioning, and still continue to function. The subjects’ cynical distance (‘I know what I am doing, but I am nevertheless doing it’) involve clairvoyance as well as deliberate illusion. It bespeaks a new game of misrecognition.

Ideological misrecognition operates differently in the cynical mode. In the Lacanian context, misrecognition is a kind of ‘constitutional, problematic recognition’ (to be differentiated from a ‘wrong’ recognition).⁵⁰ Lacan’s formulation of the concept implies that there is no way to avoid misrecognition; instead of seeing misrecognition as a wrong thing, it is actually a constructive phase, it is the right and ‘choiceless’ pathway to bring about the development of the subject. Althusser uses this theory to construct his classical notion of ideological misrecognition and suggest that the subject is always subjectified by it. The subject-position is already predetermined by ideological misrecognition as a person learns to read the world. However, cynical ideological misrecognition paradoxically has and does not have that constitutional, unavoidable factor. Cynical misrecognition is not constitutional, hence the subject knows the falsehood very well and can avoid it if it wants to. By means of analytical reflection, the subject can leave behind the domain of ideologized knowledge, change its subject-position and have recourse to an enlightened, direct critique of ideology. However, the subject is pulled back by its ontological longing for fullness (glory, *jouissance*), and its desire to be a ‘somebody’ in society (a ‘gentleman’, a ‘lady’, a ‘classy’ subject). In order to be recognized by the world, the subject willingly lets itself be ‘normalized’ by some arbitrary ‘norm’ and re-construct its subjectivity. Disillusioned and illusioned at the same time, modern subjects schizophrenically subscribe to a system of beliefs—with a full knowledge of its nonessential, false nature—while they voice their seemingly choiceless, matter-of-fact decisions (One ‘has to’ do this). In Austen’s novels, the reconciliatory endings enact the cynical (mis)recognition in the sense that her subjects practice what they know to be false consciousness, and yet, they present it

⁵⁰ For example, the infant must see a unifying image in the mirror, and will always arrive at the conclusion that it can be a unifying subject. It *cannot* see itself otherwise or understand that it is a false image. The subsequent birth of a unifying ego is due *not* to a ‘wrong’ or ‘false’ perception.

as an extra-ideological *good-natured participation* in social life. The reason why the subject engages with this cynical paradox has a lot to do with its desire to 'be' a prosperous member of class society. And this is related to the power of ideological fantasy.

To Žižek, the whole concept of ideological fantasy can be explained in this way. First, the subject is capable of knowing what is ideological, yet the subject heeds the call of ideology because the 'ideological' and the 'fantasmatic' are always linked.

What people

overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring the real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called *ideological fantasy*. (SO 33)

In the Lacanian context, fantasy is the way in which the subject gets close to the unattainable primordial *jouissance*. Fantasy allows the subject to seek that 'absolute happiness' so as to forestall the trauma of castration or lack. In reality, the fantasmal *object a* is often displaced to various objects/people (cars, lovers) in the signifying chain. And fantasy can have a great power over the subject's mind because it functions like a frozen image on a cinema screen (S4 119-20). What Žižek has done is to ideologize this Lacanian theory of fantasy. He suggests that ideological fantasy is that discursive closure in which ideology—as a set of enchained signifiers—tries to be absolute, self-mythologizing as some 'signifiers without the signifieds' (consider concepts like 'Country', 'Party', 'Class') (SO 197). The content of ideology may change with time (in fact, one's era's nightmare can become another's conscious fantasy); however, what is unchanging is its structure: 1) the ability of some ideological signifiers to produce fixated meanings and symbolic *jouissance* ('Country', 'Party') though these signifiers do not have any meaning to fix on (no signified); 2) the subject's persistent longing for ideological, fantasmal fullness in order to hide the 'traumatic kernel', the ontological lack of the subject. Žižek follows Lacan's notion and says that ideological fantasy is always funded by the symbolic ('an image set to work in a signifying structure' E 272). However, this language is different for it aims at absolutizing the (supposedly floating) signifiers. The

ideological discourse produces a 'quilting' effect on the subject to allow it to make some 'stable and fixed point of reference' (SO 197), to establish a totality of social relations (SO 65), to root people's unity on the basis of absolute, unquestionable value (the figure of the 'Jew'), and to get a glimpse of the absolute pleasure. Lured by the guarantee of 'unity', 'absolute happiness', the subject is encouraged to identify with the frozen, ideologized, joyful discourse and conclude that reality 'must be so'.

Secondly, the paradox of the situation is that, in contradiction to ideological quilting, the Symbolic is by nature an unstable, democratic zone that operates on the politics of incessant metonymic sliding. And the subject is free to doubt/detotalize language, challenge the absolute ideological 'rigid designator' and its offered enjoyment. For example, commercials brand their products using different images and a set of 'absolute' signifiers ('Taste', 'Style'). People can always question the hierarchy, the language used, the branding policy, the enjoyment offered by the product. The subject's failure to do so (while it knows the reality can be otherwise and it has choices and freedom) has a lot to do with the very nature of the subject's ontological need. In other words, if ideology attempts to fixate the mind, the subject also '*manipulates*' and welcomes ideology. It 'uses' commercialized products to seek and desire the primordial 'Thing', to seek glory, to show off before the other. In that regard, cynicism is the best indicator of the subject's simultaneous engagement with ideological discourse and democratic disbelief—and its subsequent ideological fantasizing. It is always based upon a 'fetishistic split': '*I know that very well*' (that the product is just a thing), '*but just the same*' (I take it as if it were a Thing that can fulfill my innermost longing). I must do/buy this 'irrespective of what I think and say about it' (NT 98, emphasis original).

Thirdly, far from discrediting the system, the subject's cynical belief-disbelief of ideology ironically ensures the success of the system. Žižek considers such simultaneous obedience, critique, distance, knowledge and non-knowledge to be essential for the healthy functioning of ideology. If people take the absolute labels or signifiers (such as 'Class', 'Taste') very seriously and investigate what is in them, why some products cost so much, the system would probably break down. Ideology lives on because people obey and yet do not care too much about it, because it is

flexible to provide multiple types of pleasures—the pleasure of ideology (mis-taking a thing for an illusory ‘Thing’), the pleasure of pseudo-deideologization (allowing the subject to express its critical discontent). In the era of cynicism, ‘ideology can afford to reveal the secret of its functioning (its constitutive idiocy, which the traditional, pre-cynical ideology had to keep secret) without in the least affecting its efficiency’.⁵¹ The cynic can criticize the tribal behavior of golfing (or in Austen’s context, dancing, courtship, fashion, tea); however, it still heeds the ideological call owing to its identity or status-giving enjoyment to fill up its fantasy. And ideologization and deideologizing critique dialectically end in the act of ‘ideological re-mystification’: it becomes a cooperative, *a-ideological*, good-natured participation in social life. The example Žizek gives can perfectly illustrate this situation: the intellectual longs for ‘political *jouissance*’ (fantasy), but it distrusts all kinds of nationalistic discourse in the symbolic (analytical critique). In war times, the cynical intellectual’s longing for the fantasmal ‘nation-Thing’ (nation-glory) would burst out in a curiously (pseudo)a-ideological form: ‘let’s leave aside our petty political and ideological struggles, it’s the fate of our nation that is at stake now’.⁵²

In that regard, Žizek writes that the critical attempt to deconstruct ideology or ideological fantasy can only be fruitless. As ideology is anchored through fantasies, it can resist symbolic intervention (TN 213). There will always be some ‘real, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment’ that is indeconstructible by language, or analysis. As ideological fantasy provides a fast-track for people to get closer to the otherwise impossible *jouissance*, it plays an essential role to fill the gap by functioning ‘as a screen’ to conceal the subject’s incompleteness (SO 123). In the subject’s search for fulfillment, cynicism merely marks a sour turn of the mind. Žizek quotes Sloterdijk’s words to say that

Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it. (SO 29)

It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which Enlightenment has labored both successfully and unsuccessfully. It has learned its lessons in Enlightenment, but it has not, and probably

⁵¹ Žizek, “From Joyce-the Symptom to the Symptom of Power,” *Lacanian Ink* 11 (Fall), 20.

⁵² Žizek, “From Joyce the Symptom to the Symptom of Power” *Lacanian Ink* 11 (Fall), 16.

was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.⁵³

In terms of enlightened consciousness, cynicism still possesses the biting satirical spirit, but it has lost its subversive performance. Sloterdijk's book differentiates between a subversive, non-conforming 'kynic' and a conforming-satirical 'cynic'. In ancient times, prior to the Enlightenment movement, the 'motif of unmasking, exposing, baring' is undertaken by the satirical kynic to criticize kings, courts, ideologies.⁵⁴ Diogenes is the one who lets out a satirical laugh at the 'arrogance and moral trade secrets of higher civilization...together with its successes and shadows'.⁵⁵ The kynic bites everybody, resorts to bitter laughter, silence, antisocial body-resistance in public. The kynic wanders around, observes, and negates the value of work, power, wealth and knowledge. The true kynic is a sovereign of his own, thus he dares to say to Alexander of Macedonia 'Stop blocking my sun'. Without possessions or without any desire to teach people, or bond with anyone, he is ironic, self-sufficient, abstinent, free and unbound ('I am a citizen of the world!').⁵⁶ From kynicism to cynicism, the difference lies not in the subversive dimension, but in the admission of a longing for fantasmal fullness (in the name of 'necessity', 'ease', 'routine' or 'security' or whatever⁵⁷). The cynic's relinquishment of freedom, the wind and the sun for indoor comforts means taking up an ordered framework of rules, etiquette, and laws. The cynic's critique remains bitter, but the subject changes sides. The dialectic of a resistant enlightenment and conformism can be put neatly in this way: the subject visualizes an ideal society (enlightenment), marks the world's injustice or arbitrariness (critique), but admits the 'legitimate' rules of reality ('ideological falseness reflexively buffered'). In turn, it allows a subversive clairvoyance amidst compliance with an eye on harmon(e)y—social stability and harmony—so as to allow the capitalistic system to function, the subject to prosper, and money to roll in.

⁵³ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 164.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 184.

To Žižek, the traditional enlightenment ideal can never be separated from ideology in the first place. The Hegelian ideal of *Bildung* is 'lacanized' by him as a moment of permanent loss, with ideological compliance at the center. *Bildung* leads to the ennobling of the self for larger causes because it is an 'act of exchange': the self learns to obey power/the Other,/the State, and come into Being through 'extreme alienation'. Here we can notice Žižek's deployment of Hegelian and Lacanian language.

The starting point of this dialectic [of *Bildung*] is the state of extreme alienation, of the splitting between subject and substance, which are here opposed under the guises of "noble consciousness" and the State. ...[T]his very opposition already results from an implicit act of exchange: in exchange for his utter alienation (for his yielding all substantial content to the Other, to the State), the subject—self-consciousness—receives honor (the honor of serving the common Good embodied in the State). Between these two extremes a process of exchange/mediation takes place: the 'noble consciousness' alienates its pure-for-itself (its silent honorable serving of the State) in language qua medium of the universality of thought (flattery to the Monarch, the head of the State) (TN 22-3)

In turn,

What is therefore crucial for Hegel's notion of act is that an act always, by definition, involves a moment of externalization, self-objectivization, of the jump into the unknown.....to fully assume this radical self-externalization, i.e. "subjective destitution": I am only what I am for the others. (TN 31)

Žižek considers that if *Bildung* does allow the subject to understand the universal, the process lies in devoiding the subject of its original substance ('subjective destitution'), and replacing it with a self-objectifying Otherness. Through this process, the subject is guaranteed to enter into the social system, or avoid the pain of nonidentity, or nonbeing (SO 181), but the subject does not know it can act otherwise. The 'enlightened' (ideological) conformism is self-negating, but *necessary* and *comforting*. It 'heals the wound of subjectivity', and allows the subject to avoid confronting the ontological lack (TN 171). It is essentially an act of commodification in which the subject receives honor, 'the honor of serving the common Good embodied in the State' (TN 22).



Zizek problematizes the 'enlightened' way of mixing reason with ideology through his analysis of the 'rational' master-discourse. While it is true that logical thinking aims at reducing bias and enabling people to engage with reflection and critique, the master's voice imposes an imperative demand on the subject and requests its unconditional (ir)rational compliance—for the sake of respecting authority, or social harmony. To quote Zizek's comment on the enlightenment project in full,

'Reason autonomously! Use your own head, free yourself from all prejudices, do not accept anything without questioning its rational foundations, always preserve a critical distance...' (SO 80)

'Reason about whatever you want and as much as you want—but *obey!*' That is to say: as the autonomous subject of theoretical reflection, addressing the enlightened public, you can think freely, you can question all authority but as a part of the social 'machine', as a subject in the other meaning of the word, you must obey unconditionally the orders of your superiors. This fissure is proper to the project of Enlightenment as such: we find it already with Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*. The obverse of the *cogito* doubting everything, questioning the very existence of the word...but the very first rule emphasizes the need to accept and obey the customs and laws of the country into which we were born without questioning their authority (SO 80).

As 'a part of the social machine', the subject willingly suffers self-alienation, sacrifices its reason, relinquishes its critique to accept the 'unquestionable' authority, the orders of the superiors, the world. Thus Zizek believes that enlightenment reason is by nature self-cancelling, and the critical subject will be subdued because it 'feels' it must honour the 'rational', authoritative master-signifier. However, as long as the subject sincerely and whole-heartedly believes in the master, its conformism is ideological, but not cynical. Modern cynicism arises because of the *bankruptcy* of the master-discourses, which usually occurs after a series of traumatic social changes, wars, or failed political reforms. The subject's disbelief towards the 'Queen', 'Communism', the 'Educational system', 'Justice' (while it still pays attributes to the Queen, serves the communist regime, works at the university, or in the law court) is not only self-alienating, but self-contradicting. Self-interest is the only reason that makes the otherwise clear-sighted subject keep up its inconsistency. In short, though enlightenment reason is not in itself cynical, the way in which it

works (ideologized conformism) helps sow the seeds for the era of modern cynicism: enlightenment reason grants the traditional intellectual the power to think; however, after intense reasoning, the subject sublates reflection and docilely accepts the fact that 'Law is law'. Though the modern subject is disillusioned and not docile, it still cynically declares that 'law' is 'law' (with a sneer). In opposition to the principled belief in social or class harmony, the cynical subject knows money or survival is the name of the game. The cynic questions authority, but tolerates its unreason because it calmly 'philosophizes' the world, and takes 'the universe of social customs and rule' as a 'nonsensical machine that must be accepted as such' (SO 81).

In the past, critics from the containment school presuppose that Austen cherishes an unequivocal identification with conservative ideologies, whereas the subversive school believes Austen adopts an equivocal voice to undermine the 'common' reality¹. However, in this representation, the enlightened subject's 'cynical misrecognition' (or even a cynical Austen) has no such identification with conservative or romantic ideologies, or desire to change or subvert the reality. The Austenian subjects *defend their reason to the death* (as symbolized by their firm, marital decisions: the patriarch or the matriarch's temper or censure cannot shake their will). And once the mind is enlightened, it results in an 'irreversible awakening'². At the end of the stories, Austen's subjects clearly see that the romantic or conservative (Burkean) ideals have *failed* to improve the essentials: the class system at large is rigid and oppressive to women and the poor, inheritance practice remains unfair and discriminatory to the marginalized. Austen challenges the

¹ Marilyn Butler calls Austen a 'committed conservative'. To quote the words of Junkerman, 'I see Austen aligned with a tradition of thought that includes Mathew Arnold, Henry James and T.S. Eliot. It is a thoroughly English tradition...and many of its premises can be traced back to Edmund Burke: its ideological conservatism, its social ideals of accommodation and integration, and its advocacy of a 'common' culture' (*Containment and Emancipation* xiii). On the other hand, D.W. Harding (from the early subversive school) says there is no advocacy of 'commonness' in Austen's novels. Instead, he argues Austen has a 'regulated hatred' towards her 'common' society. 'Her books are...enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked; she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine' ('Regulated Hatred: An Aspect on the Work of Jane Austen' 41). And her objective in writing is an 'desperate' attempt to find 'some mode of existence for her critical attitudes' (44). Marvin Mudrick states that Austen's irony alienates her from any commitment to the message in her writings. These readings are significant in upsetting Austen as a 'complacent, entertaining novelist of manner, conventional and orthodox in her opinion, niggling and aloof in her judgments' (*Irony as Defense and Discovery* 171).

² Sloterdijk, 59.

Burkean ideal in the sense that, no matter how hard people try, the rural gentry will never form a defensibly ideal community. There is always an absence of good-will in the ‘common society’: neighbors are at odds with each other (PP), men stereotype and criticize women (NA, P), snobbery drives people to erect intra-class marital barriers, romantic subjects narcissistically impose themselves on others and believe they are superior creatures (SS), opportunistic people try to outwit people in order to get money or a wealthier partner (NA, SS, E). Meanwhile, Austen also negates romantic, individualistic discourse on the hope of total (social) renewal. The romantic subjects’ discourse denotes an Other-oriented empty speech, and romantics are by nature unreliable in their sentimental enforcement of ideals (SS, P). Trapped between the disillusionment towards romantic, revolutionary and conservative ideals, Austen sharply alienates herself from these two camps. It would be too much to assume that Austen upholds the cynical impulse to ‘put off her commitment and feeling’ as her ‘first condition of writing’ (Mudrick). Unlike the cynic (who has no commitment to anything, no desire to teach, no wish to bond with anyone), Austen is fundamentally a writer committed to fashion, ballroom or teahouse—even though she does cynically laugh at her love of trivialities (e.g. dress and gossip). From an historical point of view, Austen’s adoption of cynicism is far from accidental.³ To maintain the functioning of class harmon(e)y, her stories narrate a world in which the subjects turn from reason or critique to an ideologized, enlightened self-preservation and money consciousness. The subject becomes ‘an average social character’—fundamentally critical and subversive, ‘but fully integrated into the work-a-day world’ (xii). Cynicism leads them to endorse a ‘subversive reason’ that disidentifies with reality, but these subjects ultimately return to it, and acknowledge its legitimacy with open eyes and an unusual enjoyment of bourgeois harmon(e)y⁴.

³ As Avrom Fleishman observes, Austen’s writing appears at a transitional point when English society fears the aftermath of French Revolution might undermine the cohesiveness of their stable society, together with its traditional institutions of the family, the community, and religion (Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis*, 15.)

⁴ Walter Benjamin’s words actually offer a fitting explanation to highlight the limits of the cynic’s criticism: ‘Critique is a matter of proper distance. It is at home in a world where perspectives and prospects are important and where it was still possible to assume a point of view. In the meantime, things have become much too close for comfort for human society. ‘Disinterestedness’ and the ‘unbiased perspective’ have become lies’ (*Einbahnstrasse* 1928, 1969, p.95 quoted from Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxxii).

In this way, Austen's complex vision of enlightenment is 'no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: [she] knows the falsehood very well, [she] is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still [she] does not renounce it' (SO 29). Austen completes her 'dialectics of misrecognition' as she values the rise of positive recognition, admits the centrality of lack and non-improvement, and finally, foregrounds the necessity of ideological reconciliation for the normal functioning of subjects in the world. As the Austenian subjects prosper in the business of love, marriage, family and finance, Austen anticipates the way in which modern subjects (in the era of nineteenth century bourgeoisie capitalism, or the age of twentieth century consumerism) can practice transgressive problematizations to negate ideological masks or designer labels, and yet discover the essentiality of masks/labels because the subjects still have good reasons to retain them in order to live and prosper. Under such circumstances, Austen's novels do not point towards containment or subversion, but towards the struggle between the necessity of intellectual re-cognition and the persistence of misrecognition. Austen's strategic, enlightened vision is perhaps best described by Sloterdijk in these words: Austen's novel

scarcely believed in a change for the better, it did not give in to the temptation to desensitize itself or to get used to the given order of things. To remain sensitive was, as it were, a utopian stance—to keep the senses sharpened for a happiness that will not come, a stance that nevertheless, by being prepared for happiness, protects us from the worst kind of brutalizations.⁵

* * *

In what follows, Chapter 2, on *Northanger Abbey*, addresses the question of fantasy and the love of pleasure. Together they favor the birth and persistence of misrecognition. Chapter 3, on *Sense and Sensibility*, examines the crisis of ethical consciousness. Chapter 4 deals with the love of the Other in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Otherized self is bound to have a conflictual relationship with the neighbor. Chapter 5, on *Mansfield Park*, provides a reconstruction of the slave subjectivity, and how it can generate the possibility of social regeneration. Chapter 6 foregrounds the

⁵ Sloterdijk, xxxiv.

moral hypocrisy of the enlightened subject in *Emma*. Chapter 7, on *Persuasion*, explores the question of agency of two conscientious subjects. It shows how retroactive interpretations can alter the present. The last part is the conclusion.

Chapter 2: The Pleasure of Fantasy in *Northanger Abbey*

[Self-consciousness] attains therefore to the enjoyment of pleasure, to the consciousness of its actualization...which appears as independent. (PS §362, 218)

One might say that the backcloth of experience consists in the construction of a certain system of...pleasure, defined as anticipated pleasure, and which tends for this reason to realize itself autonomously in its own sphere, theoretically without expecting anything from the outside (S7 31)

Like Hegel, Austen begins her narratives with a 'naïve subject' whose sole aim is for the 'enjoyment of pleasure'. Her early works lay bare the formation of the naïve mind, and Austen foregrounds how certain types of language have been preferred by the subject because of their power to engineer, in Lacanian terms, 'a certain system of pleasure'. At an initial glance, Austen's idea of enlightenment refers to the Hegelian process of pleasure-relinquishment. As all critics have noticed, the naïve subject has to give up its egoistic pleasures for the recognition of an 'objective' reality. But *Northanger Abbey* actually goes further than this. In addition to undermining the naïve subject's illusion, *Northanger Abbey* also reveals to readers that the 'non-naïve' subjects are not without their fantasmal facets: to be 'realistic' is to follow a predetermined social fantasy in everyday society. In turn, readers are invited to witness how 'education' is but the substitution of one type of fantasy for another. The lack of improvement (especially of the paternal consciousness) is, however, masked by a pseudo-optimism at the end of the novel—when the Austenian subjects cynically accept the patriarchal and snobbish society as it is. As Austen hastens her happy ending, *Northanger Abbey* embodies Žižek's remarks—reality often evolves around the ideological and the fantasmatic, and 'there is no reality without its fantasmatic support' (TN 90).

It is in this sense that I try to overcome the polarized beliefs of the containment and the subversive schools, arguing for the persistence of fantasy in the 'dialectics of misrecognition'. In the past, early critics have concluded that Austen's educational journey aims at a conservative refutation of 'unreason': Austen desperately wants to offer a corrective mode of thinking. FR Leavis says that Austen has 'an essential

moral interest' in her works.¹ Henry Tilney's voice is often regarded to be authoritative, moral and rational. Stuart Tave says that 'Henry's admonition to Catherine...is an active direction' that draws Catherine to see 'it is she who has been blind'.² Later on, critics ideologize this 'moral interest' and align Austen's 'reason' with (Burkean) ideology. Marilyn Butler says *Northanger Abbey* makes 'a clear statement of the anti-jacobin position': 'The tendency among the routine anti-jacobins was to create Satanic demons—villains who were dangerously close in the temper of the times to being heroes'.³ In opposition to these opinions, the subversive school undertakes a symptomatic reading to argue that Austen actually tries to change the definition of reason and unreason. One stream valorizes feminist theories and says that Austen is against Henry Tilney's authoritative, 'patriarchal unreason'. For example, Claudia Johnson suggests that Henry defines the parameters of speech to 'preempt not only the female's power of refusal but even her power of speech'.⁴ And Paul Morrison points out that Henry's 'scene of instruction' can only 'foreclose "dreadful" or deviant interpretive possibilities' to prioritize male scrutiny.⁵ The other stream is more radical. While Marilyn Butler implies that Austen's novels are against the gothic mentality, many subversive critics openly declare that Austen is on the side of gothicism. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Austen is sympathetic to Catherine for her problem lies *not* in her gothic (mis)reading of reality, but in her entrapment. Catherine is 'right' after all. She suffers because she is trapped by the rational reading, the 'interpretations of the General's children'.⁶ Lionel Trilling's short but famous preface points out that the motif of *Northanger Abbey* is to foreground the 'truth' of the gothic reality, and the dangers of the mundane world⁷. Later on, many critics simply argue that Austen believes that the gothic world *is* the real world. Diane Hoeveler says 'Both worlds are essentially the same, Bath being only what we

¹ Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 51.

² Tave, *Some Words of Jane Austen*, 62-3.

³ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 180, 181.

⁴ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 37.

⁵ Paul Morrison, "Enclosed in Openness: *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Carceral" *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 33 (1991 Spring), 17. 1-23.

⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* 137.

⁷ To quote it in full, he says, 'We are quick, too quick to understand that *Northanger Abbey* invites us into a snug conspiracy to disabuse the little heroine of the errors of her corrupted fancy—Catherine Morland...believes that life is violent and unpredictable. And that is exactly what life is shown to be by the events of the story: it is we who must be disabused of our belief that life is sane and orderly' (*The Opposing Self* 207)

might recognize as the tamer, “cooked” daytime version of the “raw” Northanger, while the Abbey at night, as constructed by Catherine’s gothic imaginings, is the nightmare version of Bath’.⁸ Maria Jerinic, in her article ‘In Defense of the Gothic: Reading *Northanger Abbey*’, offers a defense of ‘gothic subversion’ to argue that Catherine is ‘validated by her gothic reading’. Gothic novels invite women to ‘trust their own “power of interpretation”’.⁹ According to these arguments, Austen is actually endorsing the gothic mind-set for it accurately mirrors the horrors of the world.

In this reading, I attempt to deal with reason and unreason in a different way, arguing that both are to be sublated by the persistence of fantasy. Austen, as the conservative school says, affirms the voice of reason (characterized by Henry Tilney). However, as enlightenment reason encourages the practice of autonomous critique, it also leads Austen to subversively turn against Henry’s sexist, non-egalitarian ‘reason’. This is the subversive side of Austen. Claudia Johnson has pointed out how irrational Henry can be: ‘on the first day he meets Catherine,...he tells her exactly what she ought to write in her journal the next morning’.¹⁰ But, in my view, Austen is definitely not arguing for gothicism, or its accurate portrayal of women’s conditions of existence. Women are oppressed like gothic heroines, but *not* for the same reason. The General is in no way a gothic character either. I will later on argue that ideological *jouissance* and gothic *jouissance* are essentially two different things, though they can display the same symptoms (violent male behavior, female victimization). Austen would have doubted the appropriateness of gothic subversion if ‘female empowerment’ means the exploration of people’s houses without the owners’ consent, or the interpretation of others as murderers without proof. In what follows, I will show that *Northanger Abbey* attempts to debunk the formation of subjectivity and its choice of (sentimental or gothic) fantasy. These fantasies are to be replaced by the rise of reason, only to return to a new fantasmal mode of existence. In the end, Austen’s cynicism shows us that she does not, as the containment school proclaims, simple-mindedly subscribe to (Burkean) ideology.

⁸ Diane Hoeveler “Vindicating *Northanger Abbey*: Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen and Gothic Feminism” in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed Devoney Looser, 121.

⁹ Maria Jerinic, “In Defense of the Gothic: Reading *Northanger Abbey*” in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser, 138, 147.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 37.

Austen sees through the power and the tricks of 'legitimate' ideology; however, the question of social survival forces her to revert to an 'enlightened false consciousness'. Her subjects return to the world, and truly reconcile with it.

* * *

To Austen, the formation of the self begins with language. Instead of seeing humans as 'ego-oriented' creatures, Austen's story alerts readers to the 'Other-oriented' nature of the subject. She shows us that language is what constructs people's beliefs, while the subject can be buttressed by signifiers without any awareness. In her *juvenilia* like 'Love and Freindship' or 'Jack and Alice', young men and women imitate Werther's language and assert that 'egoistic' feelings must be the ultimate authority to measure everything. Words like 'My Life!', 'My Soul', 'My Adorable Angel' are used liberally to give weight to the subject's emotions.¹¹ Young ladies come to believe that a young man must be fundamentally unmarriageable if he has not read Werther and does not have auburn hair. Hence Laura and Sophia persuade Janetta to abandon the sensible Graham and elope with a 'romantic' man—who ironically turns out to be a fortune-hunter. As the self is governed by the language of the Other, a young man may follow the (cinematic, or) literary convention and come to conclude that parents' orders must be flouted: 'I scorn to marry [a woman] in compliance with [my father's] wishes. No! Never shall it be said that I obliged my father' (81).

If language produces the subject, Austen reveals that the subject is prone to select certain sets of signifiers instead of others because they help construct 'a certain system of pleasure'. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine's naïve choice best reveals the criterion of the subject's selection: enjoyment. Fantasies produce a new reality to give pleasure to the subject, and they attract the subject's attention immediately. Hence Catherine gives up the 'Beggar's Petition' (history) and opts for 'The Hare and many Friends' (fantasy). In Lacanian terminology, fantasy is defined as a pleasurable discourse that aims at hiding the ontological lack of the subject. It allows the subject to have a glimpse of the lost *jouissance* (Oneness), although, in fact, it merely throws the subject into a temporary, illusory state of happiness. However, even though the subject knows the excitement is false, it is not likely to give up its pursuit. In Bruce Fink's words, fantasy provides a sensory-perceptual fulfilment and a teleological direction for it

¹¹ See 'Love and Freindship' in *Minor Works* 86.

takes the place of the former "wholeness" or "completeness", and fantasy—which stages this second-order *jouissance*—takes the subject beyond his or her nothingness, his or her mere existence as a marker at the level of alienation, and supplies a sense of being.¹²

As a child, Catherine finds learning a painful duty, hence she first turns to the fantasmal discourses to ‘heal’ the pain of symbolization. And she loves ‘the pleasure of walking and breathing fresh air’ so much that in fine weather she is ‘out more than half [her] time’ (174). Many critics mistakenly highlight Catherine’s pursuits as a mark of her ‘naturalness’ (for example, Mark Lovelace says, ‘Catherine is natural, unheroic: she is associated with the natural in several senses’.¹³) However, Austen’s story actually tells us that there is no such thing as a ‘natural being’ in the first place. The naïve subject may seem to be egoistic, but it is always already alienated by the Other in the form of the social unconscious. Margaret Kirkham correctly points out that Catherine, though ‘young and naïve, is always shown as possessing sound, healthy affections and a good deal of native common sense’.¹⁴ Using a completely different, 19th century vocabulary, Hegel explains the ‘native common sense’ in this way: it belongs to a stage of ‘self consciousness’ ‘which...is essentially...governed by unwritten laws and social customs, a framework within which the individual lives and moves, and from which [she] does not dissociate [herself] (PS 541). In the story, without any awareness on her part, Catherine’s notion of ‘promise’ and ‘time’ perfectly illustrates her internalization of unwritten laws and customs. She would not allow John Thorpe to break her promise. Catherine feels ‘herself to be in the right’, and she refuses to retract the promised walk with the Tilneys (98). Isabella says it is ‘inconceivable, incredible, impossible’ to be ‘past three o’clock’, and ‘Catherine can not ‘tell a falsehood even to please Isabella’ (67).

In this regard, Catherine’s love of fantasy denotes not a pure egoism, but a reactionary response to the Other’s rules. Catherine has been taught by her parents and has received, in her view, a rather ‘strict’ education as a little girl. The love of outdoor exercise may be natural, but Catherine’s idea of enjoyment (boys’ games) is a deliberate, rebellious act to go against the norm (harsh lessons and feminine behavior). For example, in opposition to the female regard for flowers, Austen

¹² Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 60.

¹³ Mark Lovelace, “*Northanger Abbey*; or, Nature and Probability”, *NCL* 46.1 (1991 June), 5.

singles out the fact that Catherine has no taste for a garden, but Catherine has a tendency to pick up flowers for the ‘pleasure of mischief’, especially ‘preferring those which she was forbidden to take’ (14). The subject’s enjoyment is gained by means of a negative response to the Law: the world otherizes Catherine with a set of alienating rules (lessons, womanly behavior), and she otherizes these rules to re-create her ‘self’ and seek pleasure. Far from a ‘natural’ existence, this being-for-‘self’ is a re-self-Othering act: i.e. to flout the parents’ educative plan, to re-define itself in response to the Other, to greatly prefer ‘all boys’ plays’ instead of dolls (13).

Austen’s depiction of Catherine—as an anti-heroine—is undoubtedly a rebellious act in itself to go against the ‘law’ of literary convention. Her ‘unifying’ subject not only flouts the unwritten laws and customs of ‘perfect’ heroines, but also renders the traditional heroines puppets in comparison to Catherine’s robust subjectivity. As Catherine loves ‘nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope’ (14), Austen makes readers laugh at her anti-heroine’s silliness as well as at the ‘unnatural’ expectation literary fantasy imposes on a ten-year old ‘perfect’ heroine. However, Austen’s story shows that the two ways will eventually be violently merged as a young lady grows. The seed of convergence lies in the subject’s new idea of enjoyment.

In opposition to the love of rebellious behavior, the subject finds new pleasure in conforming with people’s expectations. One critical factor that stands out is the ‘voice of the parents’. In the novel, the parents’ approval provides the personal, interpellative force that prompts the subject to take action and re-fashion the ‘self’. While many critics notice the power of literature in effecting change, it seems that few have mentioned the power of the ideologized, paternal voice—which proves to be *pivotal* to subject-formation. It is true that storybooks (or magazines) contain plenty of lovely images, but a young lady would not spend *all* her efforts in imitating them—unless someone has motivated the subject to imitate it, or make a link between the two. Catherine’s parents, after seeing Catherine’s changing behavior and softened complexion at fifteen, say, ‘Catherine grows quite a good-looking girl,—she is almost pretty to day’ (15). ‘To look *almost* pretty’—this phrase proves to be vital as the naïve girl is emboldened by patriarchal approval to embark on a project

¹⁴ Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, 88.

of heroine-imitation. 'From fifteen to seventeen, [Catherine] was in training for a heroine' (15). The short, hailing patriarchal endorsement has, in Zizekian term, 'quilted' the subject to construct a new relationship with the world (c.f. a father tells a little boy to 'walk like a man'). In turn, a subject can define itself through that word, build an imaginary relationship between itself and some fantasmatic 'models', reform its behavior, and enter the world through that image. While Zizek says this exchange of the subject's original being for honor and praise is a self-emptying act, Austen believes that it can mean 'improvement'. At least Austen ironically says it is essential for Catherine's heroine training programme. Catherine's 'improvement was sufficient, and in many other points she came on exceedingly well' (16). Hence, though Catherine's formal education fails, she finally turns to the heroine-subjectivity qua literature qua patriarchal approval. It is in this sense that we can understand why Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that 'Heroines, it seems, are not born like people, but manufactured like monsters'.¹⁵ In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen shows us that the process of 'subjectification' (or what Zizek calls subjective destitution: 'I am only what I am for the others' TN 31) is gained at a high price.

The process of subjectification is nothing less than 'self-alienation'. *Northanger Abbey* debunks the way in which the subject willingly conforms to an image constructed by literary or paternal fantasies. In contrast to the previous 'self' which upholds a being-against-the-Other, Catherine is buttressed by an imaginary signifier to exist for the Other. In this 'being-for-an-image' (lady), the Other precedes the subject and speaks for and about the subject before she even opens her mouth. Lacan explains that 'the subject is born insofar as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other' (E 198-9); but the subject does not randomly select any signifier in the field of the Other. Instead, its choice is related to a particular symbolic fantasy, a 'frozen image' that appeals to the subject in a given time, space, age and class culture. The subject identifies with one image and misrecognizes itself, and may switch to pursue another image as it is placed in a different context or grows older (a wild child, a demure lady). However, we must note that different images will have different appeals to the subject, hence the subject does have choices in the selection and representation of images in the signifying chain. But owing to the fact that fantasy—

¹⁵ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 129.

myth, superstition, stories—is mediated in an imagistic-linguistic manner, with a peculiar ability to answer the subject's ontological longing for fullness, all fantasies are notoriously difficult to deconstruct. First, the symbolic (critique) does not have complete control over an image/the imaginary; second, language cannot easily displace the ontological needs of the subject and its love of fullness.¹⁶

In *Northanger Abbey*, to act out the frozen image of a full-fledged 'lady', Catherine docilely caricatures the Other. Austen marks this unnatural change with ironic amusement. From a girl who believes the dismissal of her teacher the happiest day of her life, Catherine fills her life with 'artistic' pursuits. She

could not write sonnets, she brought herself to read them; and though there seemed no chance of her throwing a whole party into raptures by a prelude on the pianoforte, of her own composition, she could listen to other people's performance with very little fatigue. (16)

From Pope, Catherine 'learnt to censure those who

"Bear about the mockery of woe."

From Gray, that

"Many a flower is born to blush unseen,

"And waste its fragrance on the desert air." (15)

It is easy to see that the pursuit of cultural activities—poetry or music—for an image/identity does not necessarily mean acculturation, for acculturation implies the rise of an analytical mind and the enrichment of one's horizon. On the contrary, cultural consumption-in-itself merely aggravates superficiality, or a false love of culture to heighten one's narcissistic regard. In the story, Austen implies that Catherine's behavior is essentially a process of 'alienation'. For 'the training of' a heroine, a young person can take part in activities that she does not like in the past, and probably cannot understand at present. Poetic expressions are installed in Catherine's mind for their 'serviceable' uses (15). Eventually, it culminates in a 'doubling' of consciousness: Catherine's robust, spontaneous self co-exists with an *incongruous*, fashionably demure, acquired subjectivity. Her elegant behavior is at times interrupted by her impulsive desire ('would have jumped out and run after' Henry Tilney 94).

¹⁶ In Žižek's words, 'fantasy designates the hard kernel which resists symbolic 'perlaboration' (TN 213).

While men and women cannot avoid these (self-alienating) fantasies in constructing their identities, Austen's story tells us that different genders prefer different fantasies, and the constant phenomenon is that men tend to trivialize women's views. In *Northanger Abbey*, John Thorpe's speeches represent a very 'male' discourse, with horses, money, and alcohol as his major concern. The fantasy of his malehood is marked by a worldly, 'heroic' image through which he is 'sewn' to these signifiers. He wants to be a 'Man'. John's boast and bluff are largely lies, but they may also be what Lacan calls 'going through the fantasy'—referring to the fact that one cannot speak about oneself or the reality without illusion or lies. In Žižek's words, one always speaks about the self 'qua fantasy-frame of reality' (TN 89). For example, John Thorpe says,

You women are always thinking of men's being in liquor. Why you do not suppose a man is overset by a bottle? I am sure of *this*—that if every body was to drink their bottle a-day, there would not be half the disorders in the world there are now. It would be a famous good thing for us all (63)

Now, for instance, it was reckoned a remarkable thing at the last party in my rooms, that upon average we cleared about five pints a head. It was looked upon as something out of the common way. *Mine* is famous good stuff to be sure. You would not often meet with any thing like it in Oxford—and that may account for it. But this will just give you a notion of the general rate of drinking there. (64)

Here, Austen narrates a male subject who posits himself not as a drunkard, but as a connoisseur (good stuff); he is (or wants to be) a leader of his friends and a liberal host with a great sense of hospitality (every body drinks five pints); he is the enlightener, he knows his hobby means an egalitarian solution to solve social disorders (a bottle a-day). Above all, he is a man who can undertake 'power-drinking', with a capacity to out-drink others. In this male discourse, 'Men' form a tribe, and 'Women' cannot occupy a neutral place: they are to be trivialized, or excluded completely from the fantasmatic male zone. 'Women' know nothing about men, their dreams or heroic ideals (e.g. the benefits of wine). In the story, Austen directs readers to laugh at the naivete or gullibility of Catherine (who 'readily echoed whatever he chose to assert' 65); however, she also leads us to see that a male subject's fantasy is equally self-beguiling. The origin of this self-deception lies in the love of ontological unity (fullness, glory), and the subject's subsequent engagement

with a discursive system of 'male pleasure' to incarnate this fullness (be a 'Man'). The subject cannot represent itself except through a set of gendered signifiers, and a fantasmal discourse on malehood. In turn, John's lies are an important indicator that tells the 'truth' of the subject. In Žižek's words, the truth of a subject is that its 'reality frame is structured by leftovers of hallucinatory fantasy' (TN 89).

John Thorpe loudly says, 'I never read novels, I have something else to do' (48). In Austen's defense of the novel against the male discourse, she suggests that the problem lies not in literature, but in the readers' relationship with language. Hence, instead of arguing for the elimination of the genre, or the dismissal of gothic conventions, Austen uses her narratives as a set of (analytical) discourses to force 'us' (the reader) to receive 'Catherine Morland' (a reader in the text) as a linguistic construct, a subject of shame, frustration, anxiety, desire, symptom, thereby mirroring ourselves, the formulation of our identity or being, and the way we follow language, and use language to seek psychological and social unity, or enjoyment. In turn, the task is to investigate how the subject willingly accepts the Other, and lets the Other speak for the Self. By analyzing this process, the subject can break the tyranny of language.

What must be done, essentially, is to reveal to the subjects of a society that what they are asking (and perhaps think they are getting) in their values, ideals, conscious desires, and identifications is...the enactment of a particular fantasy, which ultimately means occupying a particular position as object of the Other's desire and *jouissance*.¹⁷

As we notice how a naïve young woman can construct a subject-position by becoming the 'object of the Other's desire' (a lady), we become aware of the tyrannical power of (cinematic or social) fantasy or language on ourselves. It is in this sense that I am arguing that Austen valorizes literature as a means whereby we can, by becoming enlightened, learn to cherish differences, to read and critique the world. In the novel, Austen/Catherine Morland never rejects gothic/sentimental fantasies or believes that (domestic) realism should be the only valid mode of deliverance. If we say Austen burlesques the sentimental and gothic language through her representation of Catherine or Isabella, we should also note that sentimental and gothic novels are positively appraised to be valuable and 'charming'

¹⁷ Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 126.

to the end. *Sir Charles Grandison* is categorically rated to be ‘very entertaining’ (42). Mrs Radcliffe’s novels are ‘charming’. And many novels (‘Cecilia or Camilla, or Belinda’) often mingle ‘genius, wit and taste’ (37). The only problem is that readers are encouraged to be more perceptive, to notice the various, mutually disjoint, and contradictory elements in a novel. By questioning the discursive construction of Horror, Heroism, Manhood or Love, readers can proceed to re-conceive reality in a critical manner.

Instead of reinforcing unity, Austen invites her readers to confront disunity with a dual-voiced discourse. With the use of irony, Austen’s sentences are embedded with conflicting voices or views to invite readers to immerse in the subjects’ mind, turn against them, ask questions, and produce their own signifiers. Her narratives often imply a saying in ‘another saying, a saying in suspense, always present, which is that of interpretation’.¹⁸ Austen uses irony to convey an unreliable perspective to make readers silently disidentify with what she has written. For example, the last sentence in the novel is this: ‘I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience’ (252) In this short sentence, Austen frames her narrative by speaking from the outside, placing the gothic/sentimental fantasy-frame (parental tyranny, filial disobedience) as the agent of discourse. This sentence says something, but there is an indeterminacy that actively pushes the reader to make an interpretation themselves. The reader is ‘supposed to know’. However, Austen formulates the situation in such a way that each reader can have its own answer, and ‘it is fitting that the interpretation be enunciated in such a way as to have no other meaning than the one the listener can give it’.¹⁹ As readers ponder on the way the gothic novel promotes parental tyranny, the sentimental novel advocates filial disobedience, and how in real life, parental tyranny and filial disobedience often mean the ill-success of romance or marriage, each reader must retroactively generate their unique response and judge for themselves—thereby effectively barring the habitual acceptance of the authorial voice or the master.

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¹⁸ Nestor Braunstein, “Con-jugating and Playing with the Fantasy: The Utterances of the Analyst” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 151.

¹⁹ Ibid.158.

Susan Morgan and Alistair Duckworth both find Catherine's engagement with gothic fantasy after her entry into the abbey an unconvincing one. Susan Morgan says,

The low point of the novel for me comes at the abbey, when Catherine becomes increasingly suspicious of the General and concludes by imagining that he has murdered his wife.....[N]o reader can credit such a suspicion.²⁰

Duckworth also says,

Catherine changes from an antiheroine ingenue to an unabashed gothic heroine without sufficient explanation. Neither her reading of Gothic fiction nor Henry's extemporaneous recipe for horrors on the ride to Northanger can adequately explain the psychological shift, though Henry's invented story does quite skilfully provide the schedule for Catherine's later 'Gothic adventures'.²¹

These comments would be true if we believe that reality is strictly separable from fantasy, in which case the transgression between the two would require a formal explanation. But according to Lacan, the boundary between reality and fantasy is sometimes not so clear—due to 'the relationship of pleasure principle to the play of signifier' (S7 137).

This relationship is founded on the fact that the pleasure principle basically involves the sphere of investment...Each time a state of need arises, the pleasure principle tends to provoke a reinvestment in its content—in inverted commas, that is,...an hallucinated reinvestment of what had previously been a satisfying hallucination. The diffuse energy of the pleasure principle tends toward this reinvestment of representation (S7 137).

Simply put, structured by the love of Oneness and the frozen pleasurable image in the symbolic, the subject always thirsts for fantasy and reads reality with a latent longing for anticipated pleasure. If a fire truck wails in front of a house, people would go out and watch with longing for and anticipation of some cinematic excitement (the reinvestment of a satisfying hallucination acquired in the cinema). While reality is not exactly identical with random fantasizing, the anticipated reality can easily overlap with fantasy once the subject finds an appropriate occasion (e.g. the fire truck next door). The subject will then fantasize according to a preconceived frozen image for a moment's pleasure. Hence Lacan says, 'reality isn't just there so

²⁰ Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Novel*, 59.

²¹ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 92.

that we bump our heads up against the false paths along which the functioning of the pleasure principle lead us. In truth, we make reality out of pleasure' (S7 225). Catherine Morland's psychological transformation is comparable to those people who willingly participate in the ghost tour. People know the 'haunted' houses/objects are probably visited more frequently by human beings than by ghosts everyday. However, once they are inside the haunted house, they actively fantasize reality and view all things as potential 'objects of pleasure' or 'objects of anxiety' to search for enjoyment (an enjoyment nourished by ghost stories or horror movies). The pleasure principle directs the eyes to see what their minds long to see, their expectation is manufactured by an Otherized perception. Eventually, it is pleasurable to be scared, to feel excitement and obliterate the trauma of boredom or pain in everyday life.

Austen dramatizes this process of 'self-conscious' fantasizing vividly in *Northanger Abbey*. The moment Catherine hears of the name 'Castle', she immediately sees it as 'an edifice like Udolpho, as her fancy...[represents] Blaize Castle to be' (86). Austen deliberately challenges her heroine to notice the falsehood of her fantasy. Catherine is disillusioned and *does* understand its falsity (in contrast to the belief that Catherine is deluded all the way through): her first impression of Northanger Abbey proves to be a disappointing experience. With 'solemn awe', Catherine expects to find 'massy walls of grey stone', 'high Gothic windows', 'an antique chimney'. However, the modernized abbey has failed her. So she thinks there is 'something in this mode of approach which she certainly...[has] not expected', and she is distressed by 'the lodges of a modern appearance', 'the ease in the very precincts of the abbey' (161). Eventually, the lack of 'obstacle, alarm, or solemnity of any kind,...[strikes] her as odd and inconsistent' (161). When the General shows (off) his abbey to Catherine, the 'deviated' number of servants further upsets Catherine's investment of pleasure in the gothic abbey. Thus she exclaims, 'How inexpressibly different in these domestic arrangements from such as she...[has] read about—from abbeys and castles, in which, though certainly larger than Northanger, all the dirty work of the house...[is] to be done by two pair of female hands at the utmost' (184). Catherine is aware of the difference between this concrete perception and her literary misperception in the first place. However, just as Lacan says, 'Each time a state of need arises, the pleasure principle tends to provoke a reinvestment in

its content'. To seek pleasure, a ghost-hunter or a naïve subject like Catherine will *deliberately* reinvent the meaning of some objects, and collapse the difference between reality and fantasy. And Catherine has fashioned a new 'identity of perception' and 'identity of thought' (S7 31).

A new identity of perception refers to the fact that the more the reality differs from a fantasy, the more the subject wants to (half-consciously) hallucinate a *different reality*—or doubt there must be something hidden—to fit its expectation. Hence Lacan says, if reality 'isn't lucky enough to coincide with' fantasy, 'it will be hallucinated' by the 'interior functioning of a psychic apparatus' to produce a 'psychic reality' through a 'fictional process' (S7 33). The General tries to demystify the gothic housescape and modernize his living conditions. However, though Catherine *is* disillusioned, her longing for a gothic adventure does not stop. She still wants to enjoy, like the heroines, 'the happiness of a progress through a long suite of lofty rooms...of being stopped in their way,...or [of] having their lamp, their only lamp, extinguished by a sudden gust of wind, and...being left in total darkness' (88). If Catherine's perceptions of the abbey do not coincide with her fantasy, Austen leads us to see how a subject can hallucinate a new psychic reality. As a result, Catherine *cannot* believe all the items in the abbey are mundane objects. The letter on the drawer, though it looks like a common 'T' (for Tilney), cannot be seen by Catherine as such. She *cannot* believe she has seen most of the rooms in the abbey. She *cannot* 'overcome the suspicion of there being many chambers secreted' (183). At the end, the 'forbidden gallery' becomes her object of fantasy. As Catherine tries to see what she anticipates to see, she 'perceives' that there must be a 'suspected range of cells' for some darker purpose (188).

The awareness of falsehood is heightened as the novel progresses; nevertheless, Austen reveals to the readers that what urges the subject to go on is its love of pleasure. In the story, Catherine is dramatized as a split, self-alienated subject. Even though Catherine clearly knows her expectation to be false, she does not want to relinquish her hallucinations. Austen employs irony to note the power of language on the subject: Catherine gazes at a chest 'in motionless wonder' (163). She knows her fears are groundless, she has not 'the smallest expectation of finding any thing'. But with 'trembling hands' and with 'fearful curiosity', Catherine has 'resolved at all

hazards to satisfy herself at least as to its contents' (164). The naïve subject knows that her behavior is wrong and she has symbolically defied the Law (the General demands that everyone observe the dining hour). However, Catherine is determined to follow the duty to *jouissance*. Austen shows that the subject suffers even more if she is split between two types of *jouissance*. Catherine loves Henry and enjoys his company (the pleasure of romance). But she also realizes that he is not likely to approve of her pursuits. And Catherine's split subjectivity can be seen through her uncomfortable self-alienation and self-surveillance in front of Henry. For example, when she gets carried away by Matilda's story, in the face of Henry, Catherine denies her fear/excitement, and begins 'earnestly to assure him that her attention had been fixed without the smallest apprehension of really meeting with what he related' (160). And when Henry asks Catherine about her reaction to the storm, she tries to give a 'sensible' answer and thinks that 'for the world would she not have her weakness suspected' (174). Catherine is extremely conscious of her mistakes and their effects in the eyes of Henry. So her first response to all her 'gothic investigation' is that: 'Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly!' (173). She always knows she must enact her fantasy *alone* to eschew the Law's gaze. And she tries to explore the late Mrs. Tilney's room without any companion for it is 'impossible to explain to Eleanor [her] suspicions'. Catherine especially wishes 'to get it over before Henry's return' (193). Austen reveals how a subject, under the lure of the fantasmal signifier, would rather endure split than to forgo fun and excitement.

If the subject relies on empirical perception (as suggested by scientific/traditional philosophical discourses), the subject can still realize the differences between fantasy and reality. The chest contains nothing after all. However, once the subject switches to use a new mode of 'thought', Austen's story tells us that the contradiction between fantasy and reality can be overcome—ironically—by the use of 'observational reason'. Catherine's empirical experience tells her that it is a modern abbey, but her gothicization of the abbey is strengthened by her 'rational thoughts'. Thus, the more she 'thinks' about the world and the General, the more intensive is her fictionalization of Northanger and its residents. She sees it as a 'rational' deduction: the General's refusal to enter into Mrs. Tilney's favourite narrow winding path indicates that he is an 'unkind husband' (180). Though Catherine has visited the graveyard of

Mrs Tilney, Mrs. Tilney becomes the victim of Catherine's fantasy. Mrs Tilney is thought to be still alive, though 'shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food' (188). In short, facts cannot be challenged by pleasure-oriented thoughts because fantasy emerges precisely in order to fill the gap between the observed content and the underlying position/motive of observation. Catherine then 'cites' gothic novels as 'real records' of human behaviour. Gothic characters become real people to 'affirm' the General's diabolism: she feels 'secure from all possibility of wronging him' because he has 'the air and attitude of a Montoni!' (187). So even though she sometimes starts 'at the boldness of her own surmises', she justifies herself for they are 'supported by such appearances as made their dismissal impossible' (188).

* * *

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's notion of awakening coincides with Hegel's idea of *Bildung*. Both writers postulate that the subject begins with a naïve love of pleasure, progresses to a heightened stage of alienation and estrangement, and finally, ends in a state of cultural enrichment. Hegel suggests that growth begins with self-relinquishment so that the consciousness will be '*driven back into itself...*[to ponder] its inessential nature' (PS §483, 293 emphasis original). Jonathan Robinson's words help clarify this concept: 'Alienation in the sense of renunciation is Hegel's ultimate concern in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*. The alienated self is constantly being spurred on both by its own need to regain its own nature and by the influence of *Bildung* to give up what it has [its particularity] in order to become what it really is'.²² And reconciliation is possible only because the subject has decided to relinquish itself to go on to a higher stage:

the consciousness...returns into the *self* as the *negative power* of this antithesis, so these two realms of the self-alienated Spirit will also return into the *self*; but if the former was the first, merely *immediately* valid self, the single *person*, this second realm, which returns out of its externalization into itself, will be the *universal self*, the consciousness which has grasped its *Notion...*will dissolve in *pure intellectual insight* (PS §486 296).

²² Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind: An Essay in the real and ideal*, 25.

In this light, the naïve subject must renounce its pleasure-seeking tendencies, and return to the world with a new awareness of the previously unwritten 'laws'. Hence he calls it an 'externalization' process to highlight how this change signifies not a betrayal but a return to the self, with 'intellectual insight'.

Austen uses the most humiliating method to punish her heroine so that readers can laugh at Catherine as well as at Austen's act of re-creating the literary convention. First, like Hegel, Austen sees that the dialectic of pleasure can be the mechanism of disillusionment. Catherine's search for fantasmal objects brings her pleasure, but it always leads to 'unending self-frustration'. She continuously sees 'the sheer emptiness' of its pursuits—the empty cabinet, the chest. Feelings of incongruity occur and Catherine is reduced to 'shame' from time to time. As Catherine explores Mrs Tilney's room, upon seeing the tidiness of the room, Catherine's pleasure is automatically cancelled: 'a short succeeding ray of common sense added some bitter emotions of shame' (193) to make her feel 'sick of exploring'. However, in contradiction to Hegel's belief, Austen notes that even if the naïve subject forsakes her fantasy, it does not mean she will progress to a higher stage of understanding.

Austen then lets her 'perfect' heroine be caught red-handed at the height of her folly. Austen directs her naïve subject to understand the necessity of law after a lecture. At the end of Catherine's 'enlightenment', Catherine can reflect on her former 'Self': language has lured her to nurture a 'voluntary, self-created delusion', 'an imagination resolved on alarm' (214). However, while Hegel postulates that this law denotes an 'absolute universalism in which all individuality is shattered' (PS 542), Austen differs from Hegel's optimism. Austen proposes that this practice is neither absolute, nor neutral. Yes, the subject will be guided by a new law, but this law is neither fantasy-free, nor ideology-free. It merely signifies a forced choice to which the naïve subject must 'unconditionally submit' in order to enter into the world.

To Austen, the 'Law' of reason is not a 'natural', gender-neutral entity with absolute validity as Hegel perceives it to be. Henry stands for that law in the novel, and Margaret Kirkham correctly points out that Henry 'is not without some of the affectations of a clever young man as is shown in his strictures on Catherine's use of 'nice', and in his expounding of the fashionable doctrines of the 'picturesque' in

Chapter XIV. In both instances, he is clever, rather than sensible'.²³ Austen anticipates Lacan in seeing that reason, instead of being an absolute, universal entity, has a discursive quality—it is constructed by and through language. Catherine adopts her sentimental femininity and gothic reasoning from storybooks and from the gaze of the parents. In a similar vein, she learns from Henry—and under his gaze—the discourses of reason. From the outset, Henry is cast in the role of a university master. His discourse ascertains the importance of education, knowledge, history, art, and normality. In his view, pleasure should always come second to the pursuit of knowledge. Thus his laughter (at the intellectual poverty of her life in Bath and her conversation with Mrs Allen) represents the master's rejection of non-intellectual females. In his lecture to Catherine, Henry heightens the priority of master signifiers, which Catherine always knows to be important with her naïve sense of social custom. He challenges Catherine as he cites the laws of 'Love' (the cornerstone of Christian marriage), 'Culture' ('Remember the country and the age in which we live'), 'Civilization' ('Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?'), 'Law' ('Do our laws connive at them?'), 'Race' ('Remember that we are English'), 'Religion' ('that we are Christians') and 'Common sense' ('a neighborhood of voluntary spies' 197-8). As master signifiers present dominant concepts and can clarify reality and make everything become readable in an instant, readers and Catherine are led to see his points immediately.

In the text, Catherine unconditionally accepts these laws and goes back to her room with 'tears of shame'. 'The visions of romance were over' (199). Catherine has learnt to note that people have 'a general though unequal mixture of good and bad' (200). However, it would be wrong if we believe this that re-education is of a purely rational nature. In the story, the parents fail because a 'plain' education bores the young lady, and she seeks fulfillment in happy fantasies. Education in the context of *Northanger Abbey* is more of a matrix of reason *and* fantasy: Catherine allows herself to be re-subjectified by a new discourse *because* Henry is the charismatic master who can answer her ontological longing for happiness (principles, love). Pure lawlessness (John Thorpe) cannot agree with Catherine's naïve understanding of truth; however, pure reason—which is actually embodied by the voice of a *woman*,

²³ Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and the Fiction*, 88.

Mrs Morland—would be too boring for her (as in her no-nonsense advice that Catherine should ‘never fret about trifles’ 240).

In *Northanger Abbey*, the mingling of pleasure and reason (Henry is the sensational teacher!) helps explain the partial failure of enlightenment: even though the subject has been enlightened, its secret longing for excitement can easily surface and go against its ‘reason’. Hence, readers notice that the enlightened subject cannot fully outgrow her mistakes. Henry has given Catherine a lecture on her folly; however, Catherine still believes that there are ‘some subjects indeed, under which she...[believes she] must always tremble;—the mention of a chest or a cabinet for instance’ (201). Though the act of ghost-seeing must be stopped, *Northanger Abbey* makes us realize that the deed of fantasizing has merely changed form instead of being terminated. It is in this sense that Austen also anticipates Lacan’s emphasis on the introjection of reason and its fantasmal side. The subject learns to see ‘reason’. However, from the love of gothic fantasy, Catherine has switched to the pursuit of ‘romantic fantasies’ in the form of worshipping Henry, the master, and adopting his law. In the story, Austen leads us to notice how Catherine often allows Henry’s judgement to replace her own. Catherine first sees Frederick as an immoral womanizer, but Henry’s defense of his brother mollifies her dislike. Catherine is sorry for Isabella after knowing that she has been let down by Captain Tilney. But later, she begins to accept Henry’s version of Isabella as a ‘heartless creature’ (219) and his brother as a philanderer who has done no real harm. His argument has sidestepped her charge of Frederick’s immoral intention. As she thinks ‘Frederick could not be unpardonably guilty, while Henry made himself so agreeable’ (ibid), she has given up her moral stance for the love of Henry. In the words of Laura Mooneyham, ‘Catherine’s reaction to his speech is essentially a moral compromise’.²⁴ Susan Morgan also says that Catherine’s growth leads her to be attached to the ‘norms of the mature, rational male world’.²⁵ Catherine has acquired reason and learnt to think for herself; however, it also nourishes her worship of a new master. And love further heightens its blinding effect: Henry is almost perfect. ‘[H]is meaning must always be just:—and what she did not understand, she was almost as ready to admire’ (114).

²⁴ Laura Mooneyham, *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen’s Novels*, 22.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen postulates that ‘reason’ can be inextricably linked to fantasy. She uses two sane subjects to ironically lay bare the fantasmal facet of enlightenment reason. Eleanor and Henry’s ‘discursive faith’ in reason turns out to cherish an unconscious ‘fantasy-frame’ within which their subjectivities are constructed, and to promote a gender-biased, ideological mind-set. In short, rational people are not without their ‘fantasmatic support’ (to use the words of Žižek TN 90) in the reading of reality.

In contradistinction to Catherine’s gothic pursuit, Austen constructs an enlightened subject—Eleanor—who is totally devoid of nonsensical fantasies at all levels. Yet Eleanor’s ‘rationality’ leads her to favor obedience, practice subordination, and tolerate abuse from her father. Austen shows us that the enlightened subject is allowed to undertake autonomous thinking, but rational discourses do not encourage the subject to revolt against patriarchy. Instead, they buttress a ‘patriarchal fantasy’ which *endorses* domestic oppression (Eleanor thinks ‘There is nothing she can do about it’). The subject who absorbs this kind of reasoning does not even know she has subscribed to a set of patriarchal fantasies. According to Eleanor’s self-(mis)recognition, she is all rational.

Catherine takes flight in novels to seek excitement. And she is capable of criticising historical discourses because of their male-oriented pedantry, i.e. they are unpleasantly male-dominated (‘in every page...the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all’, 108), they are unoriginal (‘a great deal of it must be invention’ when speeches, thoughts and designs are ‘put into the heroes’ mouths’ 108), and they are voluminously dull (the writers of history labour ‘only for the torment for the little boys and girls’, 109). In short, she rebels against historical discourses because they represent a ‘male’ reasoning which is tedious and discriminatory against women. Unlike Catherine’s fun-oriented perspectives, Eleanor loves history. She adores novels, but is not addicted to them. Eleanor thinks she is different from Catherine because she finds historical discourses rational and pleasurable. She defines historical discourses in opposition to fantasmal discourses: ‘Historians...are not happy in their flights of fancy. They display imagination without raising interest’ (109). However, we can notice that Austen represents Eleanor’s love of history as a kind of fantasy-reading. In *Northanger*

²⁵ Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen’s Novels*, 72.

Abbey, Eleanor's love of history is very similar to Catherine's love of gothic novels. Eleanor goes on to declare that, in history books, she is 'very well contented to *take the false with the true*' (emphasis added). She has 'faith' in the historian's (patriarchal, fantasizing) authority for she believes that 'they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as anything that does not actually pass under one's own observation' (109). Catherine, who openly endorses imaginative stories, critiques these 'discourses of reason' as artificial 'invention' ('the chief of all this must be invention' 108), or a display of a hegemonic voice (for the slave's perspective is suppressed; so Catherine laments the dominance of kings, popes, the absence of women). She concludes that history is very 'tiresome'. However, Eleanor, who believes in 'reason', is submissive to these male-oriented discourses and their fantasmal 'invention' masked in an objective voice. In other words, while the pleasure of literary fantasy offers an imaginary Oneness to Catherine, the 'pleasure of history' provides a comforting authoritative totality and unity to Eleanor. Her faith in patriarchal fantasy (master-narratives) eventually leads her to confuse history and story when she sacrifices accuracy for aesthetics. As a result, she thinks inventions in history are mere 'embellishments' and

If a speech is well drawn up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made--and probably with much greater, if the production of Mr.Hume or Mr.Robertson, than if the genuine words of Caractacus, Agricola or Alfred the Great (109).

Austen ironically shows us that the enlightened mind is blind to the worship of the master: if Catherine throws away 'The Beggar's Petition' to prefer 'The Hare and many Friends', Eleanor reads 'The Beggar's Petition' and takes it *as* 'The Hare and many Friends'. As Eleanor prioritizes (male-oriented, 'objective') fantasy to truth; the love of 'rational discourses' can only reinforce her cult of the master and repress her resistant consciousness. In turn, she has followed a role prescribed by the patriarchal fantasy. Eleanor is represented to be the good, quiet, suffering woman. Eleanor's obedience to the General makes her a docile body. She 'rationally' accepts her role as a subjected inmate, 'a nominal mistress' of the Abbey (225). Gradually, her life becomes a vicious cycle: for all her love of the (patriarchal) rational discourses, her enunciating position as a woman can only prevent her from being heeded, and her father never hears her. The

disciplined obedience to the voices of the 'rational masters' can only further reinforce her gender subordination and sink her voice to insignificance.

Reason grants the enlightened subject the ability to think and reflect on her unhappy situation, hence Eleanor is often depressed. In the text, the solitary walk symbolizes a flight from the patriarchal world into the maternal roots of her being (it is her mother's favorite walk). However, reflection does not grant the lady the power to question the father's patriarchal authority. And Eleanor actively chooses to endure its fantasmal 'unjust' legitimacy. While Catherine's 'gothic dreams' leads her to feel the presence of a 'ghost' in a stormy night, to make bold 'observations' of the General, Eleanor's 'rational fantasy' leads her to see respect and legitimacy in an irrational, irascible father, to suppress her reflective thoughts. Catherine is always aware of the possibility of her errors, yet Eleanor's lack of imagination leads her to believe that she is leading a life without misrecognition. The faith in 'reason' leads her to endure patriarchal illusions with open eyes (i.e. feminine subordination is acceptable, and to be tolerated). Eleanor's life is full of 'habitual suffering' (251). Ironically, Eleanor becomes the *henchman* of her father. She quietly obeys his voice when he summons her. She is the one who carries out the order of her father to drive Catherine away—even though she does not like it. The docile subject is fully aware of her dilemma in obeying an unreasonable command ('Dear, dear Catherine, in being the bearer of such a message, I seem guilty of all its insult'), but Eleanor's behavior reinforces the priority of the father's voice. Instead of taking any resisting action, she conforms to her father's wish, and tries to diminish her responsibility ('yet, I trust you will acquit me' 225). Austen draws readers' attention to the fact that Eleanor's 'rational' fantasy and Catherine's entry into 'reason' can only lead them to practice a new game of self-Othering—women repress their own likes or dislikes to follow the father/husband's order with stoic tolerance. In the end, Eleanor—the rational lady, with the most ungothic mind-set—turns out to live exactly like a gothic heroine (victim) for entirely different reasons. For Eleanor, the only way out is to wait for the enactment of another patriarchal fantasy: to have a man, a romantic hero to rescue her from her plight.

Austen's problematization of (paternal) reason is shown in her profoundly ironic, ambivalent attitude towards Henry Tilney. Henry Tilney's intellectual stance marks an

enlightened, open-minded acceptance of various kinds of knowledge or books. However, its openness is embedded within a conservative tendency to rate knowledge according to the traditional hierarchy (high culture/serious books versus low culture/easy reading). From the beginning, Austen has characterised Henry as a man with a knowledgeable, bird's eye (panoptical) perspective. It can be seen in his first conversation with Catherine: he presents himself, he questions the Other, extorts information from Catherine as to her impression of Bath (the Upper Rooms, the concert, the theatre). He enjoys his conversation with Catherine, but at the same time he distances himself, reflexively laughs at the nature of the talk (its formality and content), laughs at himself for yielding to adopt this mode of conversation. With 'affected astonishment', he pretends to be surprised by Catherine's having stayed in Bath for one week. This surprise is feigned because he is ridiculing social conventions and himself: he knows social rules have ordained that 'some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable than any other' (26). Henry harbors a self-indulging panopticism for he clearly enjoys his self-reflexivity: 'Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again' (ibid). In the story, Henry loves story books (the 'low' culture), but emphasises that one should take great pains to acquire a solid education (history, art). Henry can make egalitarian observations, he goes on to note that women can write good letters and there is a fashionable 'delightful habit of journalising' among women. He can be gallant and playful at masking his conservative, patriarchal debasement of women's abilities. From praising women ('Every body allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female'), he proceeds to have an 'objective' appraisal of women's abilities—only to paradoxically reject their intellectual achievement. Women's letters are 'faultless' except that they have 'a general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar' (27).

Northanger Abbey foregrounds the charms and dangers of an enlightened perspectivism that incorporates reason and myth, open-mindedness and enclosure, prejudice and observation, imagination and facts. Armed with knowledge, reflection, biased judgement, patriarchal assumptions and witty words, the rational subject can affirm, and transgress as well as mask his parochial perspective. The panoptical view denotes that the speaking subject has adopted a *presumably impersonal* perspective

to empower him to exercise sound judgement, with universal validity. This discourse is what Lacan calls the voice of the master, who ‘proceeds in an unconditional manner and required to be obeyed on the sole authority of its enunciation’.²⁶ As this speaking position aligns itself with objectivity and accuracy, Henry’s words lack the ‘I think’, ‘I believe’ that is characteristic in Catherine’s subjective vision. His judgement is packaged to enjoy a master’s authority, and he utters his criticism with a voice conveying creditability. Mark Bracher highlights the twofold interpellative power of the master’s voice: first, this voice categorizes, posits, and hails the subject to *be*, to see one’s identity allocated by that system of discourse. Thus Catherine sees herself as an ignorant lady. She also sees how Henry judges and identifies Mrs Allen as a foolish woman though ‘Mr Tilney was polite enough to seem interested in what she said’ (29). She follows Henry’s eyes to read Captain Tilney as a ‘deceased man—defunct in understanding’ (206). Secondly, the interpellative power of the master’s voice can mobilize the subject to *become* a certain person. Once people begin to subscribe to that system of discourses, they will follow the master’s voice (in order to avoid being judged negatively). In the words of Mark Bracher, ‘Individuals are to act, think and desire only in ways that function to enact, reproduce, or extend the System’.²⁷ Thus Catherine willingly relinquishes her thoughts to follow the authority of Henry. Catherine senses that Isabella is doing mischief to her brother, but she yields to the consolation of Henry that it will soon pass. Henry ‘must know best’ (153). With his humor and enlightened (self-)reflexivity, Austen’s story has featured a man whose voice is more tyrannical than his charming, open-minded appearance. His speaking position has denoted a kind of supreme authority. S/he who does not want to be judged must follow the master.

In the Lacanian context, the fantasmal side of the master lies in the fact that the master is blind to his love of recognition behind his logical arguments, and his desire to impose a hierarchical, totalizing reading on the world. In other words, the master is not aware of his goal: i.e. through the construction of a detailed, never-ending System, the master hopes to regain a sense of Oneness in Being. These are the university master’s ‘*intellectual fantasies*’. Hence, we are not surprised by Henry’s

²⁶ Renata Salecl, “Deference to the Great Other: The Discourse of Education” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 163.

²⁷ Mark Bracher, *Lacanian Theory of Discourse, Subject, Structure and Society*, 115.

love of the 'gender hierarchy'. And many critics come to see Henry as a progressive male chauvinist.²⁸ However, in the novel, Austen's position is far more equivocal. Henry is the enlightener who loves all kinds of knowledge (novels, muslins), but he looks down on Mrs Allen's concern with fashion. Henry picks on women's linguistic fluidity as a kind of 'incorrectness of language', and resorts to a masculine notion of linguistic clarity, in particular, to Johnson and Blair as the ultimate authority of the day. However, he also favors an egalitarian education, and progressively notes that sex has nothing to do with outstanding achievement.

I should no more lay it down as a general rule that women write better letters than men, than that they sing better duets, or draw better landscapes. In every power, of which taste is the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes. (28)

If Austen points out that the master's intellectual reading of the world/women may shift slightly from time to time, she also draws us to notice that his love of recognition always remains unchanged. In the story, Austen shows us that the master's open-minded love of instructing others can be a narcissistic love of enlightened dominance. Henry Tilney gives Catherine a crash course on drawing, and Catherine's 'attention was so earnest that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste' (111). The free indirect style here forces readers to question Henry's 'objective' evaluation when he is biased by his vanity: Henry believes that Catherine has taste, but whether it is a truly objective observation, or whether she is believed to have natural taste *because* he is the teacher is left undetermined.

Under such circumstances, Austen's equivocal 'non-saying' allows her readers to make their own propositional knowledge. Readers are urged to examine Henry's contradictory positions in order to reveal the gentleman's *a*, his unconscious fantasy, his cause of desire, which operates from the seemingly innocent thirst for 'Knowledge', 'Education' and 'Correctness'. By exposing the thought of the master,

²⁸ Sandra Gilbert and Gubar note 'For all his charming vivacity', Henry's 'misogyny is closely identified with his literary authority...to shut up Catherine inside this "horrid" novel by finally acquiescing to her status as a character' (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 140). Claudia Johnson notices how Henry 'takes away the feminine power of refusal, simply by turning a deaf ear to it' (*Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* 38). Mooneyham rejects him as 'Much of his instruction [to Catherine] is for his own amusement, not for Catherine's benefit; he finds her too valuable an object of irony to wish to change her into an equal partner' (*Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* 18).

and what is admirable about him, what he admires (ignorant ladies), what he fails to admire (small talk, substandard letter-writing), readers are pushed to ask themselves whether they also subscribe to these master-values or pursue these fantasies (for example, the division of serious/petty knowledge in economics/home economics, standard/substandard language in the form of dialect or idiolect). The novel's ambivalent, equivocal stance—'Henry must know best'—invites the readers to appreciate the master (indeed he knows a lot), but it also provokes them to explore the arbitrary, contradictory, repressed messages in his speaking position. In short, Austen's acknowledgement of and nonidentity with the master's hierarchy aims not at denouncing Henry's misogyny or re-asserting women's achievement (which means the construction of another new hierarchy/totality), but about the creation of a new master-signifier. By countering the tyranny exercised through language and a 'normative' perspective, readers can constitute a radical break with tyranny by producing new values, formulations of their views, or discursive positions.

* * *

If Austen problematizes enlightenment reason as fallible and paternal, she also affirms its importance and praises it. Despite its flaws, enlightenment reason is the only mode of thought that gives a self-grounding account of action. Though reason does not enjoy the objectivity it claims to have, reason is the only form of thought that uses proofs or arguments, has an instantaneous mass appeal. It is also serious enough to undertake political resistance and refute traditional authority. In *Northanger Abbey*, many critics have hailed Catherine's liberating 'gothic agency'. However, in the story, Austen has ultimately questioned this mode of reasoning for it is too frivolous, too game-oriented to be political, or to have any genuine regard for evidence, truth or resistance. It is true that gothic thoughts can be liberating, but they are usually too particularistic to gain any consensual mass support. Gothic stories may invert traditional authority, or turn the father into a villain, but they do not refute the father's authority. Instead, gothic novels foreground how everybody ultimately fears and yields to the patriarch until some divine force strikes him. In addition, Catherine's gothic reasoning does not rely on proofs or evidence in making her accusations; and if her guess is proven right, she is not likely to publicize her discovery or stage any vigorous resistance against the General. By adopting the

female speaking-position in gothic novels, Catherine's stance can only heighten the helplessness of women. For example, Catherine is firm in her belief that the General is a murderer, but the moment she hears the General's voice, like the gothic heroine, she feels 'terror upon terror', and is 'hardly able to breathe' (192). Austen's irony drives readers to ridicule Catherine's behavior, but it also alerts us to notice the inadequacies of 'gothic resistance'. Gothic fantasies advocate an *imaginary* subversiveness. In reality, the subject docilely obeys the voice of the father and needs 'the protection of visitors' in order to face up to the formidable patriarch.

Hence, contrary to the current (postmodern) faith in the liberating power of monstrosity, gothicism can only rouse one's resistant consciousness at the back of the mind, or in the darkness of the cinema, but it seldom leads to an agentic subjectivity because it lacks the cogency, the legitimacy, the interpellative power of the master signifier. Its enunciating position is too subjective and its enunciated content is too fun-oriented to be stabilized, or to take a long look at reality, or withstand the attritive daily struggles, or win mass support. Catherine's ultimate desire is not to get herself engaged in power struggles, but to be 'in pursuit of amusement all day long' (78). Meanwhile, though the master signifier should be constantly redefined, deconstructed and liberated from its tyrannical, totalizing tendency, master signifiers (like 'truth', 'freedom', 'equality', 'integrity') ought not to be negated. According to Žižek, master signifiers have a constitutive *and* performative dimension to interpellate, to constitute all subjects into citizens and propel them to defend a shared enunciating position (though there also lies the root of its problems: for people tend to take these positions as a 'factual state of things'²⁹). Such an enunciating position (Defend truth! Love fairness!) is naturally not ideology-free, but it can give the subject a firm ground to advocate agency. Simply put, master signifiers are effective for they constitute and regulate the 'idea of reality' (for example, the idea of 'Fairness'). The performative dimension of the master signifiers mean that they can mobilize people (e.g. feminists, dissidents, or politicians) to take large-scale, collective action if the reality does not fit this 'idea'. In the story, Henry Tilney is the only agent who dares to stand up to his father, and fight against the imperative order of the General. His resistance comes directly from

²⁹ See Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects," in *Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious* 78.

his engagement with the master-signifiers 'reason' and 'honour' in the enlightenment discourse. He is the only person who dares to challenge his father's irrationality as 'steady as the sanction of reason and the dictate of conscience could make [his opposition]' (247). The General's

anger, though it must shock, could not intimidate Henry, who was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice. He felt himself bound as much in honor as in affection to Miss Morland, and believing that heart to be his own which he had been directed to gain, no unworthy retraction of a tacit consent, no reversing decree of unjustifiable anger, could shake his fidelity, or influence the resolutions it prompted (247).

His determination to marry Catherine leads to a 'dreadful disagreement' between the father and son. Austen's story foregrounds the way enlightenment reason can break new grounds. It is not like the sentimental/romantic idea of 'autonomous' action—which takes the 'rebellious self', a self produced by the Other/romantic literature to be sovereign. Henry represents an Other-oriented subject who takes 'reason' to be the supreme 'lawgiver', and his 'rebelliousness' is backed by some constructive master signifiers. In that light, Henry's behavior may have a romantic sheen (he fights his father), but it is actually a rational decision mobilized not so much by the heart but by the head. In this case, reason has led the subject to forgo material comforts (symbolized by the world of *Northanger Abbey*) for principles. Henry would rather stay in Woodston than oblige the wishes of his unjust father.

Austen endorses Henry's enlightened rectitude, but she ironizes the way in which the enlightened consciousness can be seen by the world as an aberration of the mind, a 'moral fantasy'. Rectitude is regarded by the General as 'fantasmal' because he simply takes it as a moral illusion. Reason is said to enjoy universality; however, Austen is disillusioned enough to know that the world seldom follows rational principles. And very often, people denigrate rational behavior as a kind of moral 'illusion': to be 'realistic' is to abandon moral scruples. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen reveals how much moral values count in gentry society. Isabella Thorpe abandons James Morland once she gets to know Captain Tilney. Captain Tilney knows Isabella is engaged to another man and still woos her. John Thorpe, upon knowing that he cannot marry Catherine Morland, immediately blackens Catherine's name in front of the General. The General flatters Catherine and subsequently throws her out of his house

because she is not *that* rich. Henry's insistence on marrying Catherine mirrors his love of principles, but this integrity is seen by his father as a stupid pursuit. Austen's story leads us to see that the world often perceives reason as *foolery*. The General's comment on Henry's final decision to marry a poor girl is this: let him '*be a fool* if he liked it!' (250, emphasis added). Austen makes us recognize that the reward for the enlightened consciousness is marginalization. Henry's quarrel with his father leads him to familial alienation and social isolation. He must remain in Woodston till any hope of reconciliation occurs. In the meantime, the world remains snobbish and dark. The Abbey remains an 'unimproved' estate, a power center in defence of the authoritative, snobbish class system.

It is in this way that I see *Northanger Abbey* as in no way a gothic story, but a novel about the alliance of the ideological and the fantasmatic. Austen employs the gothic framework, but there is nothing gothic about *Northanger* at all. The gothic illusion exists only in storybooks and in Catherine's mind. Recent critics tend to read *Northanger Abbey* as gothic in its narrative frame as well as in truth. Their argument is grounded on their reading of the General: the General is actually a gothic patriarch who takes pleasure at harassing and brutalising his wife and his two gothic female victims—Eleanor and Catherine. To quote Claudia Johnson,

gothic fiction represents a world which is far more menacing and ambiguous, where figureheads of political and domestic order silence dissent, where a father can be a British subject, a Christian, a respectable citizen, *and* a ruthless and mean-spirited tyrant at the same time, one who, moreover, in some legitimate sense of the term can "kill" his wife slowly by quelling her voice and vitality.³⁰

Austen may dismiss "alarms" concerning stock gothic machinery—storms, cabinets, curtains, manuscripts—with blithe amusement, but alarms concerning the central gothic *figure*, the tyrannical father, she concludes, are commensurate to the threat they actually pose.³¹

Paul Morrison further says that Henry 'misses the point' because 'far from being opposed to the dungeon as darkness is to light, the parlor reinscribes gothic clausturation in the mode of light or visibility, all the more effectively for eschewing the obvious mechanisms and paraphernalia of gothic enclosure'.³² However, I would

³⁰ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³² Paul Morrison, "Enclosed in Openness: *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Carceral" *Texas*

like to assert that *Northanger Abbey* is never about 'the General as a gothic father', or gothic novels' ability to mirror 'truth' (oppression in reality). On the contrary, reality can defy gothicism and be more oppressive. And its source lies in class ideology and snobbism. I shall argue that the General is *not* a mad monk, or a Montoni. He is but another '*Lady Catherine de Bourgh*' who takes pleasure at snobbish deeds and dominating others (and nobody has suggested Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a gothic character so far). I believe there is essentially a confusion of gothic *jouissance* and ideological *jouissance* when critics try to analyze the General. Though the two types of *jouissance* manifest the same symptoms (tyrannical voice, oppression), they spring from very different sources and cherish very different mind-sets.

First of all, the gothic regime valorizes what Lacan calls a '*jouissance* of transgression' that is inextricably linked to the Real, the chaos or the 'unthinkable'. To the sadistic gothic father, to 'trample sacred laws under foot' is to express the '*jouissance* of destruction, the peculiar virtue of crime, evil sought for evil's sake, and in the last instance, the Supreme-Being-in-Evil' (S7 197). Under these circumstances, the 'ethical stance' of this pleasure-seeking sadistic subject consists in realizing 'absolute evil, as a consequence of which its integration into a fundamentally wicked nature will be realized in a kind of inverted harmony' (ibid). In other words, the subject takes it into his heart to rebel against the Other/civilization, to return to the Real (nonsymbolizable chaos, violence, disorder) as the root of his enjoyment. Secondly, as the Real zone is dominated by the unthinkable object, the gothic man is interested in blood, skull, limbs, victimisation, broken body parts, broken human spirits, enclosure. In short, he is interested in the 'Thing'—some chaotic, pleasurable, absolutely nonsymbolizable, horrible object. '[T]he inaccessibility of the object' leads him to prize this 'object of *jouissance*' (S7 203). As the Real is a pleasurable as well as a 'destruction drive', it leads the subject 'to be beyond the instinct'. It wants to go against culture, order, the symbolic, the Other, to possess a Thing that is challenged by the 'perspective of the function of the signifier' (212).

However, in *Northanger Abbey*, the General manifests none of these characteristics. His idea of pleasure is in no way transgressive. Ideological *jouissance* is a highly *socialized* and *Symbolic* enjoyment. Like all normal people, the General flees from the painful, the unknown, the chaotic Thing: he refuses to go near the graveyard or preserve any memory of the dead (his wife's painting) in his room. He loves consumption (to have, instead of to destroy). The General is not in any way antisocial or inclined to find pleasure in any 'inverted' harmony, or seek evil for evil's sake. His joy does not come from torturing others or suffering, or deliberately locking up Eleanor. His joy comes from dominance in the Symbolic zone: dictating others. Hence Eleanor is like another Mr/Mrs Collins or even Frank Churchill. She can go out, but needs to be around at all times. It leads to constraints of freedom, but it is not quite the same as imprisonment. If the General tramples blood relationship (ethical laws) under foot and quarrels bitterly with Henry, it is motivated by his love of the ideological symbol (money), and not because of his Supreme-Being-in-Evil. Secondly, the object of his interest is very much structured by the Other/civilization and by the function of the signifier instead of by a longing for the 'Thing'. His love is in full harmony with social desire. Like Lady Catherine, the General finds great happiness in showing off his servants, his garden, his furniture, his windows, his breakfast set to the world. He has no pleasure in associating himself with the inaccessible, 'gothic' objects like blood, skull, broken limbs. Happiness to him means exhorting praise from others, and his manifesting a 'happy contempt' at Mr Allen's small garden in comparison to his own. The General's violent expulsion of Catherine from his house is not an analogy to the gothic father's persecutory desire to threaten women's security, but an act comparable to Lady Catherine's violent interrogation of Lizzy—for both intend to expel the poor subjects and prevent them from gaining entry to the rich family. While gothic *jouissance* goes beyond the limit in the fantasm and may end in death or displeasure, ideological *jouissance* is always confined by and within the scope of the 'normative', pleasurable social fantasy: to marry well, to have lots of money, to climb up the social ladder.

Unfortunately, *Northanger Abbey* tells us that this seemingly harmless 'dream' can be more horrible than gothicism. While everyone notices that the gothic father is

mad, ideological fantasy decrees a justified 'realistic' snobbery to legitimize the exclusion/persecution of the poor. In addition, it does not necessarily take a father, a man, to be the persecutor—for a woman can occupy this position equally well (c.p. Mrs Ferrars's disinheriting Edward Ferrars, Lady Catherine de Bourgh's harshness to Lizzy, Mrs Churchill's oppression to Frank). Ideological fantasy does not need the gothic setting or the dungeon. It does not go against the social norm, for ideological fantasy *defines* reality and *is* the fantasmal norm. It creates an alliance of the ideological and the fantasmatic. It conditions everyone's dreams of becoming rich, entering into the upper class, or marrying well. Ideological fantasy creates a stable 'transcendental illusion' so that literally everyone can read each other and know their own place in the world (i.e. rich people are always welcomed by all while the poor might suffer from expulsion or an internalized self-inhibition to walk into expensive shops). In the words of Žižek,

When Lacan speaks about the "precarious" status of reality, he has in mind precisely this 'transcendental illusion' qua fantasy-frame of reality....In other words, although 'reality is determined by reality-testing', *reality's frame is structured by the left-overs of hallucinatory fantasy*: the ultimate guarantee of our 'sense of reality' turns on how what we experience as 'reality' conforms to the fantasy-frame' (TN 89, emphasis original).

As the General's 'reality' wants to conform to his 'fantasy frame' (be rich), thus he expels Catherine—a 'poor' lady—from his house in the most disrespectful manner. This message has nothing gothic in it, and yet it is more cruel.

With cynical joy, Austen hastens her story to a happy reconciliation. Austen's ironic reflexivity reminds her readers that it is the duty of a writer to bring her story to a happy ending. Hence, she follows the narratorial convention to engineer, 'in the tell-tale compression of the pages', how two pairs of lovers can be rescued from snobbish persecution to become husband and wife. However, the happy ending is *not* brought forth by the dawning of reason or the General's improvement, by parental tyranny or by filial disobedience. In my view, it is accomplished by a cynical *victory of the ideological fantasy* (Money/Class is the final solution!). The father's tyranny blocks the son's marriage, the son's disobedience can only upset his father all the more. If the antagonism remains unsolved, and the engagement is a long standing one, tyranny and disobedience cannot 'add strength to [the lovers'] attachment' in

the long run. In the story, Austen arranges for the enlightened couple to get married, and the General becomes reconciled to his son because of a triumphant ideological *jouissance*. The General feels a sudden fullness due to his daughter's possession of money/class status. It is in this subtle way that Austen sees ideological fantasy (instead of romantic love or the gothic father's monstrosity) to be the dominant dream in the society. The General, rich as he is, still wants to be richer. And he can accept Catherine after discovering that she is not *that* poor. Austen also shows how people follow the rules of class practice (instead of honorable principles) when they conduct the 'business' of marriage. The General does not approve of Eleanor's husband because of romantic illusion (even though Eleanor's husband may be 'the most charming young man in the world' 251). Though Lord Longtown loves Eleanor, he does not propose to Eleanor because of duty or romantic obligation. This charming man loves Eleanor, but does not propose to Eleanor until 'his unexpected accession to title and fortune' (ibid). And the General approves of Eleanor's marriage because it brings him glory. Without money and status, the narrator implies that the lovers can never be united.

Austen's clairvoyance leads her to see that class ideology is the ultimate governing, disciplinary force in the society. It is 'natural' for the young man to propose at that time because, without wealth, he cannot marry a General's daughter. And Austen notices that Henry may love 'a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart' (111), but if her 'financial circumstances are particular untoward', 'a clever young man' like Henry will still withhold his affection. Austen foregrounds how a young person is a nobody in the eyes of the world unless s/he is 'subjectified' by a certain class-position or by a certain amount of money. In *Northanger Abbey*, the General comes to love his daughter not because of her long years of service, piety or patient obedience, but because *she has entered into his dream or his ideological fantasy*. Austen writes 'never had the General loved his daughter so well in all her hours of companionship, utility and patient endurance, as when he first hailed her, "Your Ladyship!"' Austen cynically highlights how ideology can be more concrete, more substantial than blood ties or a long-lasting, daily relationship. The pleasure of ideological fantasy makes the General love his daughter more than ever simply because she is now a 'Lady'. However, the same

ideologized consciousness has led the father and son to sever the familial bond and part as strangers.

Austen seldom leads her subjects to rebel against the world. She understands how important class-consciousness is to eighteenth century gentry identity, but it does not mean she is uncritically on the side of Burke, or wants to offer a defence of the social system of inheritance or property³³. Austen clearly sees through the unjust, snobbish alliance of class and blood in buttressing the gentry-class system in the early stage of bourgeois capitalism. Austen is unhappy about that, hence her novels mostly feature how oppressive this system can be to male and female subjects in her times. However, Austen is rational enough to critique as well as to recognize its ‘naturalness’. Austen’s most innocent subject—Catherine Morland—also knows the importance of class values. A naïve young girl like Catherine is not without her fair share of unwritten class snobbery. Catherine is not romantically involved in her pre-Bath years because ‘there is not one lord in the neighbourhood; no—not even a baronet....Her father had no ward, and the squire of the parish no children’. ‘Lord’, ‘baronet’, ‘ward’, ‘squire’—these are titles and status that denote Catherine’s notion of acceptable alliances. Such a marriage, if it takes place, can only consolidate class hegemony. Austen does not think a portionless lady (like Isabella Thorpe) is likely to be accepted by a wealthy family.

Austen’s cynical reason has driven her to resort to a fairy-tale like ending so as to ‘sew’ her subjects back to a state of happiness and reconciliation. The satisfaction of the General’s fantasy throws him into ‘a fit of good-humor’ (ideologized fullness). And with a cynical *nonknowledge* of his father’s injustice, Henry becomes his father’s son again. As Žižek says, though reason is essential, a non-knowledge to reality is absolutely necessary for the subject’s on-going survival in the society: ‘if we come to ‘know too much’, to pierce the true-functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself’ (SO 21). In the story, oblivion makes union possible, and the reconciliation between the father and the son rapidly proceeds to happy marriage.

³³ Burke, after witnessing the upheavals in France, defends the rights of property and writes that the English landed estates tend ‘to the perpetuation of society itself’ and ‘the possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction which attends hereditary possession...are the natural securities for this transmission’. He further suggests that citizens who have more property should have a greater ‘share of power, authority, direction,...in the management of the state’ (*Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790] 1969: 140-1, 150).

Austen's story implies that the attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, enlightened with unenlightened minds can only be superficial. It is essentially an empty and hypocritical gesture to have reconciliation without changes. The General, after discovering that Catherine has enough money to gratify his minimal sense of vanity, keeps up a good appearance by hushing up the past, and pretends to be a cultured, civil man. He makes his son 'the bearer of his consent, very courteously worded in a page full of empty professions to Mr Morland' (252). Austen dramatizes an artificial optimism in her happy ending. Austen knows that class ideology has erected an *insurmountable* barrier between people (or even between father and son), but Austen insists on the importance of reconciliation for the sake of social harmon(e)y. The Morlands know enough about the way of the patriarchal tradition, the influence of the father on the son's future, and the value of a harmonious kinship in society. Hence they hope for the General's 'decent appearance of consent' in order to observe class practices, to let the marriage's legitimacy be recognized by the world, to maintain a superficial harmony between the two families. In every way, Austen sees the necessity of contriving a last-minute fairy-tale ending to end all conflicts.

As Austen notes the wedding 'bell rang and every body smiled'; she has successfully sewn her subjects back to the class society in 'perfect happiness'. The patriarch's necessary consent reinforces the importance of the father, the paternal inheritance law interpellates Henry and Catherine to a life of economic security, and the (superficial) joy between the two families forestalls any discontent towards the class system. With a cynical joy, Austen invites her readers to celebrate 'the impasse of misrecognition': she has brutally unmasked and critiqued the cruel class logic: the snobbish persecution of the poor (in the form of expulsion at 7:00am). She has remasked the joy one can have in the class system. Her story dialectically foregrounds the triumph of enlightenment reason *and* ideological fantasy. The son gains his ground (reason is rewarded), and the father's snobbish dream is also satisfied. Finally, the novel features a new joy as the couple are protected and approved (at last) by the class system and by the patriarch. This happy marriage not only symbolizes the accomplishment of reason, but also ensures the pleasure of romantic, patriarchal, ideological fantasies. In the end, Trilling's remarks are untrue (that *Northanger Abbey* invites the readers to see life is insane and disorderly). The

society is governed by several dominant but very stable signifiers (titles, blood, money) for a convenient, cognitive (fantasmal) mapping of reality; instead of saying life is insane and reality is unstable, life is essentially sane and orderly. The crux lies in what Žižek says—ideological fantasy is what ‘keeps the world in its place’. The world is quilted by ideological illusions to become stable. Ideological fantasy gives ‘support to our reality itself’, stabilizes and ‘structures our effective, real social relations’ (SO 45).

Chapter 3: The Crisis of Ethical Consciousness in *Sense and Sensibility*

In the work of enlightenment, the first innocence becomes irretrievably lost. Enlightenment leads to the loss of naivete...through a gain in self-experience. It effects an irreversible awakening and, expressed pictorially, executes the turn to the eyeglasses.¹

In virtue, individuality sacrifices itself to standards that it has itself set up. (PS 544)

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen depicts how a subject has lost its 'first innocence', and adopts a law. In Hegelian terms, this new 'law of the heart' has its enlightened dimension: it is not only for egoistic pleasure, for it is directed towards a genuine love of humanity and a concern for human welfare. However, while the subject believes that its heart is just, Austen's story questions the justifiability of this 'heart' and leads readers to see it as a discursive construct. In the heart's lofty, discursive appeal to enjoy 'Feelings' and 'Love', the subject is immersed in a signifying enterprise that favors an empty discourse—a language with a designated content, and sentiment constructed by the romantic masters—while the subject believes its feelings are 'unique'. But if Austen distrusts the romantic subjectivity, she also problematizes the 'virtue discourse', the endeavor to abide by an abstract duty, or moral code. Dutiful consciousness cannot be authentic because the ethical subject is buttressed by an abstract 'discipline of the universal' (PS §381, 228), henceforth negating its self-interest. The 'sacrifice of the entire personality' (ibid) can only be 'life-denying'. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen shows us that ethical consciousness—in the form of 'heart' or 'duty'—has failed to provide any comforts to reconcile the subject to the world.

In the course of Austen criticism, the evaluation of this novel is focused on the dichotomy of sense and sensibility—framed by critics as a battle between focusing on the Other (sense) or on the Self (sensibility). This debate can be outlined in three directions: first, the containment critics believe that Austen is clearly on the side of 'sense'. Jan Fergus says, 'Austen insists...that the consideration and self-command Elinor shows are not any the less required for being invariably

¹ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 59.

misunderstood....They remain, absolutely and imperatively, an obligation'.² Marilyn Butler ideologizes this affirmation of 'sense' as a mark of Austen's anti-jacobinism:

Jane Austen advocate[s] dispassionate assessment of a future husband's qualities, discounting both physical attractiveness, and the *rapport* that comes from shared tastes, while stressing objective evidence. [She] reiterate[s] the common conservative theme of the day, that a second attachment is likely to be more reliable than a first. By all these characteristic tests, *Sense and Sensibility* is an anti-jacobin novel.³

The second stance highlights the opposite opinion. The 'subversive' critics begin to go against this 'presumed preference' to argue for Marianne and sensibility. For example, Mudrick openly favors Marianne. He says Marianne has a 'passionate, discriminating, instantaneous sympathy for worthy people and beautiful things'.⁴ 'Marianne Dashwood ...has been betrayed [by Austen]...and not by Willoughby (93). He thinks Austen is too strict: 'Not merely *false* feeling, but feeling itself is bad...because it is a personal commitment' (90-1). Kenneth Moler goes further and thinks that '*Sense and Sensibility* is not a criticism of sensibility but a criticism of 'sense' and of Elinor Dashwood. It is only Elinor who belittles the possibility of dying of love'.⁵ In reaction to this charge, a few critics begin to initiate a third approach. They believe Austen actually cherishes a double regard for both sense and sensibility. Hence, there is a 'tension' in this novel because 'Austen herself seems caught between her attraction to Marianne's sincerity and spontaneity, while at the same time identifying with the civil falsehoods and the reserved polite silences of Elinor'.⁶ Babb argues that Austen has 'a double allegiance [towards]...each sister'.⁷ Claudia Johnson argues that Austen's double allegiance to the sisters shows women are always discomfited by the institutions of 'property, marriage and family'.⁸

In this reading, I would like to point out that though 'heart' and 'duty' differ in their 'personal' and 'impersonal' emphasis, they are not as different as suggested by

² Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 41.

³ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 194.

⁴ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 75.

⁵ Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Illusion*. 66.

⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 157.

⁷ Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* 56.

⁸ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 49.

many critics. Instead, both belong to and support the same ethical system. Findlay explains Hegel's view in this way:

The ethical system in its two branches fulfils all the imperfect categories that have led up to it. It is rational in that it unites self-consciousness and objectivity. It observes itself in the customs which surround it. It has pleasure in the family life and necessity in the wider social order. It has the law of the heart at its root which is also the law of all hearts. It exhibits virtue and devotion to the 'task itself'...The ethical whole is a tranquil equilibrium of parts in which each finds its satisfaction in this equilibrium with the whole. (PS 553-4)

Simply put, Hegel believes that the ideal ethical subject will exhibit an 'impersonal', rational, objective observance of rules. It is founded on the basis of a highly disciplinary union of self-consciousness and social customs. However, the root of this 'impersonal' sentiment carries a deeply 'personal' commitment to the 'family life' and 'necessity in the social order'. And the law of the heart is the subjective, emotional expression that bespeaks this commitment. In this regard, 'sense' and 'sensibility' manifest the two sides of the ethical system, with a varying emphasis on feelings and law; and they both share the 'love of virtue' and a 'devotion to their tasks' in defending an ethical society. In that regard, Mudrick is quite right in pointing out that though Elinor and Marianne make very different judgements, their opinions about many things are actually quite similar⁹.

After locating sense and sensibility in the same ethical system, I shall argue that Austen posits 'sense' and 'sensibility' as two stages for the subject's development, and most important of all, they are the two *failed ethical consciousnesses* in response to the challenge of alienation in an early capitalistic society. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen creates several subjects who feel seriously alienated and out of place in a gentry world. Austen presents two equally ethical responses in answer to that challenge. 'Sense' and 'sensibility' represent two pathways for the ethical subject to seek the 'stable equilibrium of all the parts' (PS §462, 277), to overcome the pervasive sense of discomfort in society. However, like Hegel, Austen's story reveals that sense and sensibility are essentially two 'failed' ethical attempts. In the

⁹ In the words of Mudrick, 'the two heroines—always implicitly and at several points expressly' have similar 'agreements' on their judgement of certain characters (*Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 67).

novel, her subjects suffer immensely either because of their sensitive hearts or their dutiful consciousnesses, while morally insensitive characters enjoy triumph and success. In other words, sense and sensibility are both inadequate, they *cannot* bring happiness to the subject. Austen cynically employs ideology and Unreason as the major reconciliatory forces to bring joy to her suffering characters, and forward her happy ending. Colonel Brandon is forced to give up Eliza owing to his father's demand, Marianne fails to get Willoughby, Edward is abandoned by Lucy, Mrs Ferrars is outwitted by her favorite son Robert. Austen plans the 'rational' union of the two pairs of lovers on the basis of the 'cunning of *unreason*'.¹⁰

* * *

The opening of the novel is presented by Austen through a seemingly detached mode of narration; however, its heavy ironic undertone directly invites readers to problematize the surface-meaning of the text, and the patriarchal practices in her society. The story shows us that the death of a relative, inheritance, and the patriarch's law are the prominent factors that determine the fates and fortune of the people in this novel. But behind the smooth transition of wealth and resources, there hides painful undercurrents as the text reveals that many people's interests are sacrificed in the process. In the story, death and wealth can tighten kinship under strange circumstances. Mr Henry Dashwood is received at Norland Park because the old gentleman's wife died. Mr Henry Dashwood is to be the inheritor of Norland due to the law of primogeniture. Austen draws her readers' attention to highlight the legality and trickiness of the patriarch's law, and its arbitrary way of distributing wealth. Austen's ironic language leads readers to disidentify with the existing legal system at once. She uses double negatives to nullify the 'positive' spirit in the patriarch's law. The old gentleman 'was *neither so unjust, nor so ungrateful*, as to

¹⁰ Hegel uses the concept 'the cunning of reason' to refer to the way how history works: history uses 'heroes' (like Caesar or Napoleon) to move to a new, progressive stage, then it deposes them. The heroes are typically bad men who trample laws and rectitude under foot in order to bring forth a new order. They are governed by 'passion' (which according to Hegel, is not purely selfish or egoistically motivated). Though they may be immoral, their 'crimes' can be transformed into a 'higher order' (*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* 171/141). While Hegel suggests that these (bad) heroes will be overthrown ('When their end is attained, they fall aside like empty husks' 100/85; e.g. Alexander died early, Caesar was murdered, Napoleon was deported), Austen does *not* see that bad people will be overcome by moral forces. She does *not* agree with what Hegel says, history may set 'passion to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss' (105/89).

leave his estate from his nephew', 'but he left it to him on such terms as destroyed half the value of the bequest' (4, emphasis added). The law is easily manipulated by the patriarch to be unjustly 'lawful'. The patriarch preserves the 'positive spirit' of the law—Henry Dashwood is to be his inheritor, but Henry is bypassed by this same law to have any say on property distribution. However, as long as the patriarch (Mr Henry Dashwood) is alive, the problem remains in the background. Once again, death provokes a new cycle of wealth re-distribution. And the death of Mr Henry Dashwood immediately leads to a new, legal game for the scramble of wealth.

While the law of primogeniture decrees that Norland must go to a man's hands, Austen invites us to witness the power of the *unwritten phallogentric custom* in a culture. It directs the patriarch to favor boys over girls, and give almost everything to a boy. Everything 'is tied up for the benefit of this [four-year old] child' (ibid). Juliet McMaster suggests that the old man wants to leave everything to little Harry because of ideological interests—the 'preservation of the family name and the family estate through the generations'.¹¹ However, I believe that if the old gentleman has any genuine regard for the Dashwood sisters, he can certainly give *more* of his money to them while he 'lawfully' leaves the estate intact to Harry for the preservation of family name. The old gentleman's bias seemingly orients from a 'personal' favoritism, but it actually has a deeper, political root mirroring the (destructive) power of phallogentricism in all patriarchal cultures. (Mothers love to give birth to boys, and fathers love boys for they are more 'fun'.) Austen refutes the blind worship of boys and negates their mythical loveliness. The male child is narrated as having nothing but an 'imperfect articulation', 'many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise' (4). On the other hand, girls are characterized by hard work and good service. However, the patriarch's phallogentric bias can only sink everything to insignificance, and he unjustly chooses *not* to see the loveliness and the financial situation of the ladies. Austen ironically foregrounds the old gentleman's 'enlightened' understanding of the value of the girls, but gratitude means only 'a thousand pounds a-piece'. After the death of Mr Henry Dashwood, the mother and daughters 'were degraded to the condition of visitors' (8).

¹¹ McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, 119.

If patriarchal values neglect women, Austen reveals that snobbery can actively negate all poor subjects, and (joyfully) intensify alienation and exclusion among people. The snobbish patriarchs and matriarchs erect class barriers, and subsequently practice a 'rightful' exclusion of the less privileged subjects in the family. Hence, General Tilney's violent behavior in *Northanger Abbey* has undergone a civilized but no less oppressive turn in *Sense and Sensibility*. In this novel, Austen creates the Dashwood couple to lay bare the ideological hallmark of the landed gentry class in early capitalistic society, and how the changing status of money has aggravated the love of wealth and persecution.¹² Austen gives an 'objective account' of the persecutory process, and lets her readers read and critique the 'factuality' of the snobbish mind-set: the rights of the couple versus the violence and abuse of the exertion of their rights. By giving stress to some words in her detached narration, Austen pushes readers to punctuate the text so that they can produce their retroactive judgement, and investigate the hidden ideological forces in the society. 'No sooner was his father's funeral over' (5 emphasis added), than the Dashwood couple immediately moves into Norland. The emphasis on speed (in contrast to the nonchalance of the couple) provokes readers to perceive this act as a symbolic, class-oriented 'demonstration' of status differences, for the act is accomplished in a deliberately triumphant manner, backed by the law, to highlight the couple's sudden ownership of the house. Austen's impassive account forces readers to contrast the legality of the act and its ethical inappropriateness. 'No one could dispute her right to come', and 'Mrs John Dashwood, *without sending any notice* to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants' (5 emphasis added). The lawful entry of the couple is countered by its violence, noise, haste, and non-notification—which

¹² In *Sense and Sensibility*, the capitalistic mind-set and the scramble for wealth are haunting issues in the background. Austen narrates John Dashwood's buying of land and Robert Ferrars' buying of tooth-pick case. Both acts foreground the rich are ready to use their resources for the maximization of their pleasures. And the rich suffer no regrets in the exploitation of time, space, or the rights of others. The commodity culture drives the subjects to eagerly leave the idea of ethical ties behind. Secondly, the changing status of money also leads to the craze for wealth. In opposition to the feudalistic regard for 'blood', a new notion of social mobility begins to accept an 'intermixture of birth and cash'. Though money alone is by no means enough to introduce the subject into the class circle, Juliet McMaster's comments that the nineteenth century society cherishes the 'alliances between blood and money, the bargain by which the aristocracy is enriched, and the merchant class can promote its grandchildren into rank and title' (*The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* 125). These changes help expedite a relentless wealth-hunting game at the expense of blood relations that Austen has so well portrayed in *Sense and Sensibility*.

can only remind readers of words like 'intrusion', 'conquest', and 'occupation' in the discourse of war. Indeed, Austen wants her readers to understand this act marks the beginning of an intra-class war.

The speedy 'hostile takeover' actually reflects two things: first, an underlying ideological, intra-class contempt within the gentry class; second, the rise of a peculiar type of pleasure in the context of capitalism. In the first place, though the two Mrs Dashwoods both belong to the same class, the text urges us to notice that Fanny Ferrars comes from a wealthy family while Mrs Dashwood 'had nothing' (4). The two ladies never like each other. This hierarchy is further intensified by Mrs Dashwood's sudden impoverishment and Fanny's enrichment. The rich subjects, instead of re-distributing wealth, are evermore determined to heighten intra-class boundaries, to take over the properties of the impoverished gentry subjects. Secondly, this *joyful* occupation signifies the dawning of a new 'transgressive' pleasure in capitalism. Lacan, using a Marxist vocabulary, calls this is a 'surplus *jouissance*'. To explain this concept, Lacan follows Marx's argument that capitalists get rich by means of accumulating the 'surplus value' exploited from their laborers. (Marx notices that workers do have their wages, but the profit, the 'fruit' of their labor is so great, and it is this extra value which the capitalists skim off the top for themselves, instead of paying it to the employees that make them rich. He calls this the 'surplus value'.) Echoing Marx's idea of surplus value and exploitation, Lacan invents a concept he calls 'surplus *jouissance*'. By this he refers to a new pleasure obtained not only by means of the enjoyment of wealth (surplus), but also by means of (a wrongful) deprivation the Others' property (exploitation of the other's fruitful possession). In that sense, pleasure means the accumulation of wealth as well as a (transgressive) infliction of pain on Others (i.e. exploitation, robbing others of their fruitful possessions). In *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwoods do *not* lack money, but from their desire for this surplus *jouissance*, they want to exploit their impoverished relations. Like capitalists who seldom think they have earned enough, the Dashwood couple want to rob the mother and daughters of their possession. The couple's impatience marks their eagerness to possess wealth (surplus value), but more importantly, their happiness comes from their wish to deprive others in order to feel that 'surplus' superiority (surplus *jouissance*). The rich cousins' contempt towards

the poor ladies signifies a 'forbidden pleasure' as the couple forgo ethical custom to embrace a transgressive, unethical fun: they look down on and impoverish, not outsiders, but their blood relations. What they want is the (forbidden) fruits of the Others, the (inappropriate) surplus *jouissance*, not financial security. Hence, they have no remorse in eating up the space in Norland, and subsequently drive the mother and daughters away.

Austen once again draws readers' attention to the farcical facet of the patriarch's law as the couple keeps redefining the notion of 'needs' and 'welfare' in the legal metadiscourse. There is a profound irony in Austen's dramatization of the three proposals in the opening dialogue of John and Fanny Dashwood (considered by Reginald Farrer to be the 'among the finest bits of revelation that...Jane Austen has given us'¹³). John first thinks of dutifully giving three thousand pounds to his sisters. Fanny intervenes and regards this giving away of the money as an act of 'rob[bing] his child, and his only child...of so large a sum' (8). She argues that ethical duty does not signify for they are only half-blood sisters. The second proposal is to give five hundred pounds to each sister as 'Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious increase to their fortunes'—John 'would not wish to do anything mean' to his family (9). His third proposal is to give 'One hundred a year' as annuity. However, the fear of Mrs Dashwood having a long life and no gratitude drives the couple to come to a 'just' decision: they should give nothing at all. In the novel, Austen draws us to notice that the language of the upper gentry class is centered on a discursive image of a 'parasitic' lower gentry class (which still exists today). While the couple's 'aim' is to enjoy the forbidden surplus (to unethically swallow the whole lot of their kin's *rightful* money—after all, John has made a promise to his father to look after his sisters), their rationale is founded on a symbolic network that re-presents the lower gentry class as 'inferior, idle creatures', 'social parasites', or 'robbers' who want to destabilize their future (or their descendent—Harry's future). By constructing the less privileged subjects as potential threats/burden to the upper class, this language not only invokes/reproduces intra-class distrust and hostility, but also aims at engineering a language of 'action'. It is an actionistic speech that produces real

¹³ Reginald Farrer "Grey and Cool" (1917) in *Jane Austen: Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park. A Casebook*. Ed. B.C.Southam. (Macmillan 1976), p.88

consequences: after assigning a(n dangerous) image to the poor subjects, the rich can exert a discursive manipulation on the nature of the poor people, and violently eject them (and justify this ejection) so as to eliminate any disruption to the class order. In the story, the lower gentry class is quilted by the rich to the signifying chain through a discursively-produced, frozen image: they are ungrateful and greedy (annuity 'comes over and over every year, and there is no getting rid of it' 10; 'and after all you have no thanks for it' 11). In the end, Austen's novel directs us to notice that the rich subjects believe that they should 'rightly' withhold wealth from the poor, arguing that the poor should be self-sufficient in their own ways (a providential marriage, or an economical lifestyle).

Austen relentlessly problematizes this unethical, exploitative pleasure in the nineteenth-century capitalistic society. After fixating the lower gentry class through a negative image, the upper gentry class aggressively enjoys and wishes for the permanent 'lowliness' of their blood relations. They want to erase any chance of wealth or mobility among their kin so as to maintain self-distinction and foreground their surplus superiority. As a result, instead of giving the mother and daughters anything, the rich couple wants to take away from them the 'china and plate and linen'. John immediately notices that the 'valuable legacy' of 'the plate would have been a very pleasant addition to [their] own stock' (13). Elinor's potential to marry well, and especially, to marry into the Ferrars family is quickly declared by Fanny to be an attempt 'to draw a rich young man in' (23). With the couple's desire to enjoy an exclusive, unethical, (forbidden) pleasure at the expense of their kin, Austen's story reveals to us that the rich can suffer acutely from an inverted form of class envy. The couple become envious of the poor—for the poor seem to have some fruits of property, some possession they cannot take away. Fanny, an extremely wealthy woman, feels no qualms of conscience in her exploitation of the widow and daughters. However, she watches 'with a sigh' as Mrs Dashwood takes to the Barton cottage the 'household linen, plate, china and book with an handsome pianoforte of Marianne's'. She sighs because she is envious of Mrs Dashwood's access to pleasure: Mrs Dashwood's trifling income and small house 'should have any handsome article of furniture' (26).

Sense and Sensibility undoubtedly foregrounds the fact that women are the usual victims of the entire system. Austen must have noticed how harmful it can be to leave the fate of women in the hands of men's law, without any contractual protection, or any stipulated sum to safeguard their financial security. Susan Staves studies the ways of settling income for widows in the nineteenth century: for women with no independent income, financial arrangements could be made in formal family papers to denote how money was going to be given to the wife¹⁴. However, this contractual agreement had always been forcefully countered by a long-standing cultural norm in the domestic sphere: 'There has been a long and not entirely unreasonable prejudice' against family suits 'in either contract or tort. Relations within the family are said to be too intimate to be made the subject of contract. In contract, there is the idea that 'within the closely-knit family demands for a contractual spelling out of obligations will seem to imply an inappropriate distrust'.¹⁵ It is in this way that Austen has created a patriarch, a Mr Henry Dashwood, who makes a vague, non-contractual command to his son, John Dashwood, to look after his wife and daughters after his death. In *Sense and Sensibility*, we can see how laws in the nineteenth century context can lead to the 'double victimization' of women: the presence of law in the public sphere (the law of primogeniture) is biased against women. On the other hand, Austen's story unveils the absence of law in the domestic sphere as detrimental to women's lives. Where law is most needed to protect the poor and the young, it is sorely absent in the name of preserving domestic harmony. As men can interpret the notion of 'necessity' according to their self-interests, women are marginalized as their fates are in the hands of men. Austen's story indicates that this non-contractual custom can only bring humiliation to women, and advance disharmony in the family. Mrs Dashwood and her daughters eventually leave the family because they can no longer tolerate the harshness of their providers, or the sudden humiliation brought on them. They are 'lucky' because Mrs Dashwood has 'a relation of her own' to offer them the Barton cottage. To dependent women

¹⁴ Susan Staves says the family papers first consider briefly the forms in which agreements to pay pin money were usually made. It was usual to settle some property as the capital fund which was to support the annual payments. The property so settled might be land or it might be in another form, long leases or stock or consols, for instance....A marriage settlement or other instrument...might make it clear either than an annual sum was denominated "pin-money" ("Pin Money" in *Studies in 18th Culture* 14, 51).

with no friends or relatives, domestic harmony comes at a high price for they must accept their harsh fate.

However, patriarchy is so successful that women do not often notice this at all. Emily Zakin and Ellen K. Feder's words best describe women's situation:

Woman...is "doubly innocent": within patriarchy, she shares with man the everyday ignorance of the Law of the Father, which is exerted equally over men and women. Both are compelled to follow its dictates concerning their proper role. But the Law operates upon and against *her*, as disenfranchised and exchanged, women are unequally bound by a role which is limited and degraded in a way that man's is not. Both men and women are thrown into this world where the Law is already in effect. In this sense both are its innocents. Yet women's innocence is an achievement gained only through forgetfulness, a displacement of the conviction that she could be "other-wise". Her innocence is doubled because it is an effort of effacement, an effort not exacted from man.¹⁶

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen's female subjects have internalized the Law so well that they seem to have no notion of their fates being otherwise—for they do not complain at all. Mrs Dashwood despises Fanny and John Dashwood, but she is silent about the law of primogeniture and the non-contractual social custom—the true origins of female oppression. Women have naturalized the laws so well that they follow the dictates of the law with true 'forgetfulness': they only harbor grudges against individuals (John and Fanny), but not against the patriarchal system. The romantic lady's sensibility or the virtuous lady's sense can only reinforce patriarchal injustice. Marianne is happily ignorant where money is concerned; and Elinor's pragmatic mind leads her to employ strategic tolerance.

In short, the world as a home is symbolically destroyed by the 'fall' of Norland. In no other novel has Austen foregrounded the extent of pain and alienation on the modern mind. Marianne despises most of her acquaintances. Edward 'dislike[s] new acquaintance'. He has 'no friend, no companion in [his] brother', and his 'mother did not make [his] home...comfortable'. Elinor is forced to socialize often and take up the 'post of civility'. Colonel Brandon is always 'silent and grave' (34). In reaction to the unethical trends in society, Austen presents to her readers two kinds of

¹⁵ Staves, 56.

¹⁶ Zakin and Feder "Flirting with the Truth" in *Derrida and Feminism*, eds. Zakin, Feder, Rawlinson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 35.

resistant, ethical consciousnesses to cope with the challenge of alienation in a snobbish world.

Gary Kelly believes that the eighteenth century notion of sensibility points towards a 'domestic, aestheticized, and intellectualized form of civil society' to question the world—as a result of the 'feminized development of the Enlightenment, circulating Europe-wide'.¹⁷ However, in the nineteenth century, Hegel has already foreseen that this form of resistant subjectivity denotes an incomplete process of enlightenment. One significant point is that Hegel does not posit sensibility as a feminized discourse, or a 'feminine' stage to be hastily slighted. On the contrary, sensibility represents a necessary transitional state in the evolution of self-consciousness so that the subject can overcome the 'bifurcation' of Life, 'the oppositions of subject and object, self and world'.¹⁸ The naïve subject leaves a purely egoistic existence and comes up with a 'law'. The subject believes that, after acquiring some aesthetic or intellectual principles, 'it has the universal of law immediately within itself'. Hegel suggests that 'because the law is *immediately* present in the being-for-self of consciousness, it is called the *law of the heart*' (PS §367, 221 emphasis original). To explain this clearly, sensibility refers to the subject's rise of principles, a hearts' law—a law that postulates the subject's 'immediate', intuitive access to the world ('being-for-self of consciousness'). In the *Phenomenology*, the characteristics of this law can be summarized in this way: first, it is intuitive as '[t]he law...is immediately self-consciousness's own law'; second, it upholds a transcendental 'heart' as the foundation of this law. The 'End which self-consciousness proceeds to realize' is the heart, which, within it, has a law (PS §368, 221). Third, this unifying heart-law is antagonistic to the law of the world. Reality is seen by the heart-ruled subject to be tyrannical, a restriction of individuality. Though Hegel mentions no particular example, Rousseau's philosophy serves as the best illustration of the law of the heart. In the eighteenth century, Rousseau is a critical

¹⁷ Gary Kelly goes on to relate the culture of the eighteenth century sensibility to 'marginalized social groups such as religious dissenters. The Lichfield circle around the leading Sentimental poet Anna Seward, for example, had connections with the Midlands Enlightenment based in Birmingham and such major centers of dissenting education and intellectual culture as the Warrington Academy'. He also traces sensibility as a 'disguised' form of resistant discourse: sensibility valorizes a disguised 'meritocratic courtly culture to displace the existing ascribed social identity. ("Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society" in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser, 1995) 21-22.

figure in theorizing the power of romantic sensibility to heal the wounds of alienation and to attain a heart-oriented reconciliation. He complains about the ways of the world: 'Public things...are either too uniform or too artificial'.¹⁹ 'Incessantly politeness requires, propriety demands'.²⁰ He complains that 'You can hardly believe how nicely every article of behavior is weighed, measured, and estimated. What is not regulated by sentiment, is subjected to custom, by which indeed everything is governed. These people are all professed copyists;...*To do like other people*, is a maxim of the greatest weight in this country'.²¹ And 'the idleness of society is deadly because it is obligatory...In company it is a torture to do nothing...I have to stay glued to a chair, or stand at my post like a sentinel...I suffer at once all the boredom of idleness and all the torments of restraints'.²² The art of pleasing has been reduced to 'set rules', while the 'pleasing talents have been too much reduced to arts'.²³ Eventually, he regards sensibility, tears or a sincere heart as the best weapons to fight against an alienated existence; and a closed community as the best solution to estrangement. Private speech is the language of the heart: 'when we really feel that a heart is speaking, ours opens to receive its confidences; and all the moralizing of a pedagogue will never be as good as the affection and tender chatter of an intelligent woman for whom we feel an affection'.²⁴ Rousseau intuitively rejects the 'immorality' of the 'falsely polite' crowd. The heart decrees that he seek solitude: 'First, there is much talk but he hears nothing:...a dismal silence reigns'. Second, there are many people but he remains alone....Third, new acquaintances offer a fine welcome, but he does not trust their kindness...."The honest concern for humanity, the simple and touching outpouring of a sincere heart has a language quite different from the false demonstrations of politeness and the misleading appearances that the custom of society demands' (ibid).

Hegel notes that the (Rousseauistic) heart-oriented law has an altruistic, resistant tendency to reform society; however, the point is that this law is *too personal or egoistic to be truly universal*. The 'heart' tends to neglect the Other while it believes

¹⁸ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, xxii.

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Emile* 241.

²⁰ Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 38.

²¹ Rousseau, *Eloisa* v.2 3rd ed. (London: Becket & De Hondt, 1761), 56.

²² Rousseau, *The Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books) 591.

²³ *Emile*, 374.

it has incorporated everything in itself. In fact, Hegel points out that the law of the heart can be autocratic: for what the subject ‘realizes is itself the law’, and the subject believes that ‘its pleasure is therefore at the same time the universal pleasure of all hearts’ (PS §370, 222).²⁵ The subject is undoubtedly ethical, but from the ‘heart-throb for the welfare of humanity’, the subject easily passes ‘into ravings of ...self-conceit’ (PS §377, 226). And sensibility ends up cherishing misrecognition for the subject takes its ‘self’ to be uniquely superior to the ‘polite’ world. While the heart-ruled individual condemns the tyranny of the world, it does not realize that the imposition of its heart on others can be autocratic as well. Hegel highlights the second problem of this heart-law: the subject’s self-conceit leads it to give up the world. The heart begins with a dual intention to find the ‘particular pleasure of the individual’, and the ‘promotion of the welfare of mankind’. However, after witnessing the ways of the world, the heart-ruled subject negates reality, and prefers solitude. The subject is horrified by the world’s difference from itself. The subject escapes to a circle of like-minded friends, only to discover the third problem. Due to the particularity of the heart-oriented discourse, within the ‘romantic’ small circle, disagreement emerges because of the different, individualistic hearts. The subject tries to find a new heart-law to suit all hearts. However, this must be a frustrating project for no heart-law can contain everybody’s unique heart. As the heart-ruled subject becomes ‘insane’ with frustration, Hegel postulates that the individual will take up an opposite position—the pursuit of virtues.

Tony Tanner has long aligned Marianne with Rousseau: ‘[t]he Rousseauistic idea that innate human impulses are good and that it is society that obstructs or corrupts these has certainly reached Marianne, and she too would be happy to “tear away” much of that “system of opinions and observances” which more sober spirits such as

²⁴ *The Confessions*, 192.

²⁵ Robert Stern has put it well: ‘Here we get a further clash between individual and universal, but this time between the individual’s own law, his own moral prescriptions by which he pursues the good, and the universal law that prescribes the good for all. The clash arises because on the one hand the individual tries to impose his own law on the rest of mankind while it is in fact too tied to his own personality to be truly universal; on the other hand the clash arises because the individual is not able to recognize any law other than that derived from his own moral feeling, and so cannot recognize the true universal law that stands above him. When the individual feels this tension with the universal law, he descends into a raving self-conceit, denouncing the universal law as an intolerable constriction upon the individuality of the law of the heart’ (Stern *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* 49).

Elinor...see as the necessary collateral influences on good conduct'.²⁶ To re-read Marianne qua Rousseau qua the Hegelian 'law of the heart' has several merits. Among other things, it avoids the two polarizing responses towards Marianne in traditional criticism. The containment critics tend to judge her as a purely subjective character, lawless, irrational. Jan Fergus argues that Marianne is 'totally unfeeling' and is rather selfish in her pursuits.²⁷ The subversive school hails Marianne's feeling as liberating or authentic. For example, Moler says there is always 'truth' in Marianne's feelings.²⁸ However, both views are too extreme, for the feelings of the heart-ruled subject falls between egotism and altruism. The heart-ruled romantic subject is not, as the containment critics suggest, a purely selfish creature, for Marianne's feelings are related to a love of the welfare of humankind. This is signified by her anger at treachery (Lucy), unfairness (Edward Ferrars' sufferings). It is true that the romantic subject has voiced her feelings. However, the subversiveness of this subject is not as optimistic as suggested by the subversive school, for Marianne can be conceitedly blind and inconsistent. The heart gives moral prescriptions, but it is too tied to the subject's personality to be genuinely just or universal, and it dogmatically refuses to recognize differences, or tolerate any argument that differs from its moral feelings.

The 'orthodox' way of presenting Austen and sensibility is usually a negative one²⁹. 'Feeling' is a pivotal word in Austen studies: Austen does not endorse 'Jacobin' or 'Godwinian' sentiment. However, if we align Austen with Hegel's notion of subjectivity, and read sensibility as an essential stage of growth, we will not be so quick to distrust sensibility, or suggest that Austen must be anti-Marianne. Even though the law of the heart has to be eventually abandoned, or readers are maneuvered to see the false 'uniqueness' of the heart, Austen's story leads us to understand that strong feelings often provide the best source of resistance (owing to its personal, somatic immediacy) to challenge the hostile, hypocritical world, and, in

²⁶ Tanner, *Jane Austen* 98.

²⁷ Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 40.

²⁸ Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Illusion* 70.

²⁹ For example, Jan Fergus says, 'One of Austen's major interests in the novel is to define feeling and sensitive behavior, and she shows that it includes a capacity to estimate and appreciate others' feelings along with a willingness to act so as to consider those feelings as much as possible. This behavior is what Elinor exhibits and Marianne violates throughout the novel. It is Marianne who must learn to behave feelingly, not Elinor'. (*Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* 40-1).

the romantic context, to unite moral and personal pleasures. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen has presented to us a (Rousseauistic) character who suffers from alienation, and turns to seek a moral but pleasure-oriented reconciliation with Nature and the world. Through art, music, Nature and romantic love, Marianne believes in the heart's power to build a new morality, to reconcile people on a small communitarian basis. While her indulgence in music can be egotistic, it simultaneously marks a spirit of resistance to the 'degenerated morality' in nineteenth century society. (To use Mudrick's words, Marianne has a 'basic opposition to lying' or rigid rules³⁰). As the 'heart' is hailed as an immediate authority to judge the corrupted ways of the world, Marianne quickly notices the presence of hypocrites and vulgar gossips in everyday life. Readers are secretly delighted by her refusal to compromise with the Ferrars, the Dashwoods, the Middletons, the Steeles, the Palmers. In a truly Rousseauistic spirit, Austen has portrayed a romantic lady who practices mental absenteeism if she has to attend a party, and she always escapes from the crowd either by piano-playing or sneaking to the library.

Austen's story leads readers to understand that the heart-ruled subject's problem—the rejection of difference/the Other—is due *not* to the presence of strong feelings, but to the confusion of the personal with the universal: a problematic deeply embedded in the 'law of the heart'. Strong feelings do not necessary mean misjudgment (for Elinor has strong feelings too). The origin of the heart-ruled subject's problem lies in the fact that she tends to take her immediate feelings as the 'universal law', hence she cannot accept differences, and this narrow-minded perception can easily lead to prejudice. Marianne always 'expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself' (202). She takes her immediate heart-felt feelings to be the foundation of the universal principle: 'if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have no pleasure' (68). Austen echoes the Hegelian view that the heart should not be the ultimate legislative power (Hegel says that the heart-ruled subject 'goes on growing *qua* universality'—but only returns to justify its being-for-itself PS §372, 223). In

³⁰ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 74.

the story, Marianne's *refusal* to adjust her feelings whenever clashes arise between the individual and the Other can only lead her to perceptual bias. As a result, the story invites us to question the traditional view that a romantic must be a subversive, liberal character; on the contrary, owing to the romantic's insistence on Oneness/sameness, true differences are not appreciated. And a romantic can turn out to be a rather dogmatic person: people who are 'neither lively nor young' *must be* insensitive, spiritless creatures. Old Mrs Jennings must be insensible. Edward is dull, Elinor is cold-hearted. Instead of taking Brandon's merits into consideration, Marianne insists that Brandon 'has neither genius, taste, nor spirit...his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardor, and his voice no expression' (51).

From the very beginning, Austen refutes the transcendental power of the 'heart' for she sees it as a discursive construct. The heart has no 'immediacy' for it is governed by romantic or sentimental discourse. In this sense, Austen precedes the Lacanian view to see that the subject's 'heart' is a product of the symbolic, and feelings can be a falsified product due to the same process. In the novel, readers can easily notice that the romantic mind is neither original nor individualistic. Marianne 'copies' her sensibility from Thomson, Cowper and Scott (92). In turn, she 'forces' Willoughby to copy from her, to see 'nature's beauties as he ought'. 'They read, they talked, they sang together' (48). If Willoughby's opinion is different from hers, Marianne would use the 'force of her argument, and the brightness of her eyes' to 'convert' him (47). In the twentieth century, Lacan has analyzed the idea of a linguistic love using the example of the courtly love tradition, and he concludes that such sentiment only signifies the empty play of signifiers, the void of Being. Even though the courtly lover thinks he is truly a man of feelings, Lacan points out that the lover speaks an empty language predetermined by the Other, while his true self is a void. The love object (the lady) is not much better. She is given an inauthentic portrayal by the poet and is 'presented with depersonalized characteristics' (S7 149). She occupies no more than a symbolic function for him. Eventually, all poetic exaltations bear no actual reference to the troubadour or the lady's concrete character. Hence, Lacan concludes that all these games merely point towards a narcissistic gratification on the part of the subject—to see itself as a lover while it is

in fact a copier of empty speech, to see itself in love with a lofty creature while the lady can be 'as cruel as the tigers of Ircania' (S7 151).³¹

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen pushes her readers to realize the role of language in the game of love while she reverses the gender role in the love tradition. The poet, the persisting lover, turns out to be a lady, and Willoughby is as cruel as a tiger. The story indicates that 'heart-felt feeling or love' can be a game governed by the play of signifiers. In contrast to the ideal of an 'authentic' heart, the subject favors an empty language (a language spoken by the Other for the subject) while the subject pretends to have uttered a full speech (a language that responds to its true Being). Mesmerized by romantic poems, Marianne cannot know the true Nature or the true colors of Willoughby. Austen leads us to examine how Marianne's perceptions towards these two entities are modeled after literary artifice. And she particularly draws us to notice that the romantic subject's response towards nature is characterized by linguistic blindness instead of insight. Marianne exclaims, 'Here is Barton Valley. Look up it, and be tranquil if you can'. Edward Ferrars' answer is perceptively disappointing: the bottom of the valley must be dirty in winter for he can already see a dirty lane before him. Enchanted by her romantic preconception, Marianne cannot accept truth or a different representation of reality. Hence she can only utter a 'how strange' (88) because Edward can 'think of dirt' 'with such objects before [him]'. The irony lies, first, in the blindness of the heart-ruled subject while she thinks she is being insightful, and second, in the stereotypical romantic remark while the subject thinks she is responding to the depth of her Being/feelings. Instead of speaking a language of her own, the subject has let the romantic language speak for her.

The question of language also makes us understand why a person cannot know the true nature of their love. Claudia Johnson has correctly pointed out that Marianne and Elinor make mistakes in their choice of men because women at that time had no means to know their suitors' past.³² However, Marianne has no intention of finding out about Willoughby's past at all. Austen has anticipated Lacan by featuring a

³¹ Using a Heideggerian notion, Lacan theorizes that the empty speech is more than an idle talk (Heidegger). It is inauthentic, unmindful of Being. It lets language speak the subject instead of having the subject speak the language. The subject is registered in a discourse in favor of the Imaginary as it speaks a language in imitation of the other (an image, a star, a model) to assert a false autonomy of the self. Full speech refers to the opposite. It listens to silence and responds to the voice of Being. The subject abandons the imaginary autonomy of the ego and admits its alienated state of existence.

linguistic love with ‘depersonalized characteristics’, backed by a narcissistic intention. The heart-ruled Marianne symbolically manufactures a ‘new Willoughby’ through the (depersonalized) role of a lover, and engages herself with that imaginary Willoughby. Willoughby is from the outset lured to occupy that codified role and be the lover, bearing no reference to his past or to his feeling (his real feeling is that he ‘did not *then* know what it was to love’, as he later confesses 320). The intriguing relationship between feelings and symbolic misrecognition is further intensified by the subject’s love of narcissistic gratification. A man may have no idea of what love is, but once he is lured to play the role of a lover, he willingly and happily plays out the role for his narcissistic joy. This is probably the only explanation that can help explain why a man does not know love and can be an ardent lover: for the sake of self-love. Willoughby wants to see himself capable of occupying that symbolic function and becoming *that* glorious, romantic lover. In this light, the idealizing cult of Marianne and her hair is essentially an act of self-idealization: he is now a full-fledged worshipper, plus a worshipper of a sublime lady (not just any lady, but a lady with a lofty mind). In this game, the lady can have a gratifying self-image as well: she can narcissistically elevate herself to become ‘*the* beloved’ in romantic discourse. It sends the subject immediately back to act out the role of a woman-in-love in a (depersonalized) romantic discourse. Hence, Lacan says that though a different reality can be dimly acknowledged by the subject, the subject will fanatically cling to its pleasurable fantasy. Austen uses a third person’s (Elinor’s) perspectives to draw our attention to the fact that Marianne clearly knows that her father has two wives, but her ‘lofty’ mind cannot believe in a second attachment.

Even though the subject may speak an empty language, we are invited to ponder on the power of discursive inscription on the body. Žižek has summarized the effect of language in this way: language can ‘produce effects in the Real’, and ‘we can undo things (symptoms) with words’. (Hence ‘the whole point of psychoanalytic cure is that it operates exclusively at the level of ‘knowledge’ (words), yet has effects in the Real of bodily symptoms’³³). In the story, Marianne almost gets killed because her literary unconscious directs her to simulate the fate of romantic heroines. Though

³² Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* 59.

³³ Žižek, “From Joyce the Symptom to the Symptom of Power,” *Lacanian Ink* 11 (Fall), 14.

the speech may be depersonalized, this language is certainly not empty in terms of consequence (c.p. love songs, with their non-specific 'you-and-me' reference, can have effects in the minds and bodies of thousands of people). Tears come to Marianne's eyes when she thinks of Nature, and a broken heart nearly kills her. We can see that the romantic (empty) language can go beyond the confines of the symbolic, causing psychical and somatic disorders. The image of 'dead leaves' can drive Marianne to tears or reverie, 'with transporting sensations' (87). And Marianne cannot be 'tranquil' whenever she looks at the Barton valley. Though the heart is an unoriginal construct of language, it is undeniable that it can invoke images, and inscribe upon the body an original, radical, pleasurable, trans-symbolic 'fullness' (in this case, the 'romantic sublime'). As this trans-symbolic feeling is beyond the governance of language, Elinor's reproach is useless to combat the body's sensations. It is only through the subject's active relinquishment of the heart-ruled discourse and its subsequent adoption of another set of discourses that the subject can undergo change.

Meanwhile, *Sense and Sensibility* leads us to see that Marianne is not, as the subversive school claims, a radical figure. The subject speaks a radical language of Love and welfare, but Austen's story shows us that the heart-ruled subject's 'action' does not always live up to that language. 'Love' may be a popular vocabulary in the apparently egalitarian romantic (political) discourse, but Rousseau's writing indicates that he regards many people as 'professed copyists' and he certainly does not want to associate with them. In the story, love has a very restricted application—for Marianne believes that almost all people (except her family and Willoughby) are vulgar creatures, unworthy of her attention. And Austen's story reveals another problematic aspect of the romantic mind: if any clash arises between the individual's feelings and the noble principle, the heart-ruled subject will adhere to her personal feeling even if she *can* recognize the justified principle that stands over her. Marianne visits Allenhurst with Willoughby without notifying or seeking the consent of Mrs Smith. Elinor recognizes that the law of privacy should stand above personal interests, hence she questions Marianne's rights to go to Allenhurst. Marianne is 'quite angry' with Elinor's challenging the 'discretion of her conduct'. Austen uses dialogues to contrast the two ethical views: Marianne voices her personal feeling,

and gives a circular argument on the heart's sovereignty (as long as her heart evinces pleasure, the act must be just and lawful). And Elinor insists on the impersonal nature of law observance: 'If [Allenhurst] were one day to be your own, Marianne, you would not be justified in what you have done' (69). The result is that Marianne recognizes her misdeeds, and blushes 'at this hint'. However, the implication (that she can marry Willoughby and own Allenhurst) is so pleasurable that Elinor sees that this censure 'was even visibly gratifying to her', and the mistake is acknowledged 'in good humor' (69). In the end, the heart-ruled subject's principled regret does not last long. Austen presents to us how the romantic lady values noble ideals, but fails to see her self-misrecognition, inconsistency, and the discrepancy between the heart's love of the law and the genuine respect for the law. The heart-ruled subject finally ends in a *willful* disregard of principle if it conflicts with her pleasure. Marianne justly despises Lucy's flattery and sees that Lucy uses others to achieve her ends; however, Marianne also uses Mrs Jennings in order to go to London, and she does it without saying one (let alone flattering) word to Mrs Jennings. During the journey, Marianne 'sat in silence almost all the way, wrapt in her own meditations, and scarcely ever voluntarily speaking, except when any object of picturesque beauty within their view drew from her an exclamation of delight exclusively addressed to her sister' (160). As the subject evolves around a language-constructed, beautified self-image, Austen shows us that it can lead to a 'lofty' self-(mis)recognition. In the story, Austen dramatizes how Marianne's love for noble principles ends as her love of pleasure begins: she keeps telling Elinor about Allenhurst, and 'could Elinor have listened to her without interruption from the others, she would have described every room in the house with equal delight' (69).

Austen challenges the idea of romantic Oneness through the failed love affair between Marianne and Willoughby. First, Austen shows us that such intensive unity can seldom be lasting, and if gained, is won at the cost of rejecting the whole society. The lovers have no eyes for other people though they are in a party, and Willoughby is always in complete agreement with Marianne's views. Elinor's remarks foreshadow the doomed fate of this like-minded, intense relationship: 'Well, Marianne,...for *one* morning I think you have done pretty well....But how is your acquaintance to be long supported, under such extraordinary dispatch of every

subject for discourse! You will soon have exhausted each favorite topic...and then you have nothing further to ask' (47). Second, we know this highly homogeneous unity will eventually end. Due to the inevitable difference of the (individualistic) hearts, no two hearts can be in One for long. Marianne and Willoughby's story reveals that when all is well, these heart-ruled subjects can be at one. However, once these subjects enter into critical moments, each heart will eventually reveal its *unique* preference: for money or love. This view echoes Hegel's belief that the disintegration of the heart's law is natural: 'the law of the heart...unlike the established order, has not stood the test of time, but rather when thus tested is overthrown' (PS §377, 226).

Sense and Sensibility is thus a *Bildungsroman* about the education and enlightenment of a heart-ruled subject in its confrontation with the 'Otherness' of the self and towards the acceptance of genuine differences. In the text, Austen contrasts a 'false' awakening with a genuine growth that involves a change in the subject-position. Marianne practices a penitential self-renunciation after discovering Elinor's suffering. Her attempt is to 'tolerate' the Other, to see Lucy 'without betraying the smallest increase of dislike', to see Edward 'without any diminution of her usual cordiality' (265). In other words, it marks an effort to repress her feelings without a change of her beliefs. Austen uses an ironic language to foreground the failure of Marianne's 'success':

[Marianne] attended to all that Mrs Jennings had to say upon the subject with an unchanging complexion, dissented from her in nothing, and was heard three times to say, 'Yes, ma'am.' She listened to her praise of Lucy with only moving from one chair to another, and when Mrs Jennings talked of Edward's affection, it cost her only a spasm in her throat. (265)

Sense and Sensibility tells us that genuine change only comes with the construction of a new subject-position, which is caused by the subject's abrupt confrontation with the true me ('You are this'). The seeds of *Bildung* lie in the subject's realization of its destitution (instead of fullness), and its understanding that it has been a helpless body trapped by a set of alienating signifiers. Hence Marianne says, 'I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave' (345). She gives up her moral conceit, and understands that '[t]o the Middletons, the Palmers, the Steeles, to every common

acquaintance even, [she] had been insolent and unjust, with a heart hardened against their merits' (346).

The process of growth culminates in a change from the love of the subjective (heart) to the pursuit of the objective. This certainly echoes Hegel's view in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the heart-ruled subject now negates her individuality in the pursuit of purely objective 'virtues'. The subject switches from the supreme importance of her personality to the search for purely universal aspirations. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne declares,

The future must be my proof. I have laid down my plan,...my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved....I shall now live solely for my family....I shall never again have the small incitement to move; and if I do mix in other society, it will be only to shew that my spirit is humbled, my heart amended, and that I can practice the civilities, the lesser duties of life, with gentleness and forbearance (347).

As the subject turns from an egoistic particularity to seek an impersonal, altruistic existence ('I shall now live solely for my family'), Austen's novel foregrounds the dangers of misrecognizing *Bildung*. Many critics have protested against Austen's plan for Marianne. Barbara K. Seeber points out that Marianne's 'individualism is renounced and she is defined strictly in terms of her role as a member of society'.³⁴ However, this is exactly what Austen does *not* want to happen. While it is true that *Bildung*, in willing 'the universal as the truer expression of [the subject's] own nature', wants to posit the subject as a member of the society, it is not the aim of *Bildung* to reduce the subject to a self-less, uncritical, stationary, submissive animal, or to adopt an unreflective attitude to customary behavior. *Bildung* refers to the education, the maturation of the self in social settings so that the subject can arrive at 'an emergence to the plateau of judgement'.³⁵ It involves self-abnegation, but it does not necessitate the erasure of individuality. Austen subtly criticizes Marianne's wrong view of growth through Elinor's unvoiced comment. Marianne intends to 'divide every moment between music and reading', and read 'six hours a day' so that she can gain 'in the course of a twelvemonth a great deal of instruction which [she] now feel[s herself] to want' (343). Elinor honors her noble plan, 'though smiling to

³⁴ Barbara Seeber, 'I See Every Thing As You Desire Me To Do': The Scolding and Schooling of Marianne Dashwood" *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 11.2 (1999), 225.

see the same eager fancy which had been leading her to the extreme languid indolence and selfish repining, now at work in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and virtuous self-control' (343). With an ironic undertone in Elinor's interior consciousness, this free indirect discourse gives the reader a cognitive privilege in foreseeing the inevitable failure of the impersonal pursuit. Austen especially highlights that this plan is doomed to fail for no one can endure such a suffocating and life-denying project. Austen notes the inevitable rise of individuality in a lively character. Marianne becomes an individual with a full awareness of her duties and choices.

Instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgement she had determined on,—[Marianne] found herself, at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village (378).

Many critics lament Marianne's change and see it as a sign of betrayal. Duckworth says it is a retreat from individualism. Claudia Johnson concludes that Marianne's growth is a return to ideology. She says Marianne's growth is a return to the 'sacred and supposedly benevolizing institutions of order—property, marriage and family'.³⁶ However, I would argue that, perhaps with the exception of Elinor, no character in this novel has ever been critical of these ideological 'benevolizing institutions of order—property, marriage and family' (ibid). Marianne is presented as an ideologized subject from the beginning. She has never been skeptical of these practices (probably due to the fact that romanticism, in spite of its mask of radical individualism, constantly pledges allegiance to the ideological enjoyment of property, marriage and family). Marianne's romantic 'individualism' has never prevented her from talking of having a family with a good income (two thousand pounds), or having 'a proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters'. She ends up welcoming these practices and says 'I wish...that somebody would give us all a large fortune apiece!' (92). If Austen is ironic about Marianne's change, the irony does not lie in Marianne's 'servile' re-entrance to marriage/society

³⁵ Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind: An essay in the real and the ideal* 24.

³⁶ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* 49.

(as many critics believe)—for Marianne always aims to be thus—but in the ‘sincere ignorance’ which an intelligent, moral subject is sometimes capable of having as she evolves. Near the end of the novel, Austen adopts a narrative position that pretends to refuse to understand her heroine: ‘Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate’ (378). In a very unknowing and innocent way, Marianne refutes ‘by her conduct, her most favorite maxims’ (no second attachment) and voluntarily gives her hand to Brandon, ‘whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married,—and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat!’ (ibid). It is in this pseudo-refusal to understand why a person can change so much that Austen ironically draws readers to make this interpretation: ignorance is exactly what constitutes the subject’s happiness. In the story, reflection can only pain the subject: Elinor is the only subject who honestly sees that Willoughby would be a more compatible husband than Brandon, if not for his immoral and irreparable conduct to Eliza in the past.

* * *

In contrast to Jan Fergus’s straightforward statement that ‘consideration and self-command’ are ‘absolutely and imperatively, an obligation’³⁷, *Sense and Sensibility* shows a rather equivocal position on the ethical subject’s love of impersonal obligation. In Hegelian terms, these are the ‘knights of virtue’ (PS §386, 231) who would faithfully defend their duties in all circumstances. While Austen draws her readers to admire the ethical subjects’ courage to do their duty at all costs, she is highly aware of the price they have to pay. In the conflict between duty and self-interest, these subjects’ propensity to sacrifice themselves for impersonal, nobler causes means that they are often doomed to become tragic characters.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel says that dutiful consciousness not only thwarts subject particularity, but often leads these ‘knights of virtue’ to tragic dilemmas. Hegel notes that painful situations soon arise in two forms. First of all, the subject sometimes has to make a choice between *two types of equally rational, ethical duty*. Hegel gives the example of *Antigone*: Antigone has to make a choice between family ethics (filial piety) and state ethics (civil duty). The two irreconcilable duties force the subject to make a tragic choice (even though either choice involves a sacrifice of

³⁷ Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* 41.

personal interests: she has to suffer anyway). The subject makes a decision, and is tragically destroyed in the conflict (PS §445, 266). The second painful situation occurs due to the subject's awareness of its *lack of choice*. Once again, Hegel uses Antigone to illustrate this situation. Antigone's choice is a 'predetermined' choice, for a woman at that time must prefer domestic laws to public duties. He argues that her alignment with filial duty does not involve any choice, as 'it is one's sex which decides which law one will obey' (PS §465, 280). Hence, if the ethical subject is guilty, 'its guilt is however, not individual, but collective. It is the guilt of a whole class or sex' (§468). As the subject can perceive its entrapment, 'its whole being is consumed in pathos, which is part of...[the] character as an ethical being' (PS 555). However, given the subject's commitment to its prescribed duty, pathos cannot stop the subject for 'it cannot conceive that its duty could be other than what it knows to be' (PS 554). In a less extreme case, if a subject has to act out a role in order to fulfill its prescribed (moral) duty, the subject (e.g. a spokesperson) is likewise not being hypocritical, for it is a (moral) 'dissemblance' decreed by a designated behavioral or speech code. Hegel postulates that these dutiful people are behaving in a life-denying manner. Hegel comes to believe that self-interest will re-emerge. Virtue will be absorbed by the 'way of the world', and in turn, will be refuted by 'reason'. The new stage aims not at conformity (to ethical duties or to pleasure), but at a critical struggle and reflexivity. Julian Roberts sums up the Hegelian development in this way:

The recurring motif in Hegel...is the opposition *and the union* of individuality and generality. The individual is material singularity...; the general is concept, rule, law and prescription. For "reality", whether it be the reality of experience, of morality, or of politics, *both* sides must play a part....A person is not merely a function, he or she is a living flesh-and-blood individual....Reason is an eternally beckoning vision, equally detached from the individual and the general, and yet in the end more "real" than either of them.³⁸

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen does present to her readers the victory of the 'way of the world'. Laura Mooneyham's words represent the opinion of a lot of readers: '*Sense and Sensibility* doles out poetic justice halfheartedly; that is, the good

³⁸ Julian Roberts, *German Philosophy: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) 78.

are rewarded, but the bad are rewarded even more handsomely³⁹. However, Austen actually uses ‘poetic injustice’ to skillfully highlight the dialectical forces—the cunning of unreason—at work to accelerate her happy ending. In the story, Elinor, Edward and Colonel Brandon suffer immensely. But Austen is not like Hegel: instead of saying that the dutiful subjects will be absorbed/converted by the ways of the world, Austen features the victory of the world as the stepping stone for her subjects’ joyful consummation. In other words, if the bad do not abandon the good people, these good subjects will probably stick to their first choices, and end up choosing the frivolous Lucy or the extravagant Willoughby and suffering for life. This is the spirit of the cunning of unreason. *Sense and Sensibility* affirms the message that though ethical consciousness fails to reconcile the subject to the world, it is still valuable for it will guide the subject to a ‘right’ end by quirky means.

Though few critics have bothered to make the differentiation, we can see that the mode of tragic suffering for a man is different from that of a woman. Austen may be making a point here by highlighting how a woman’s socio-gender role, in addition to her dutiful consciousness, can transform and heighten the nature of her suffering. A man is, from the beginning, encouraged to be a fighting, honest hero—with no need of (moral) dissemblance. Edward sticks to his *impersonal* choice of keeping a promise. To be an honorable ‘Man’ is to be buttressed by the master-signifiers (Duty, Promise) without disguise. Hence, his struggle is characterized by a loud declaration and open quarrels. In the story, Edward Ferrars is torn between a substantive promise and a substantive love, a love that is rational, not a ‘youthful infatuation of nineteen’ that can lead a man to become ‘naturally blind’ (140). However, through Edward’s choice of Lucy, Austen pushes readers to realize this fact: a promise may become void of interest (or has what Hegel calls ‘empty universality’), but once a promise is made in good faith, it should have priority over an individual’s personal, though moral longing⁴⁰. Edward is aware of Lucy’s ‘ignorance and a want of liberality in

³⁹ Laura Mooneyham, *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen’s Novels* 29.

⁴⁰ Hegel has made a similar point in his *Philosophy of Right*. One has the ‘abstract right’ to make a contract out of one’s free will, but one also has the duty to fulfil it. He contends that the contractual promise, being the legal and formal expression of the free consent that constitutes the ‘objective origin’ of marriage, is indispensable. (PR §162, 200-1). Given the fact that a contract is the central basis for the perpetuation of social, economic and legal organization in all modern civil societies, all subjects have the freedom to enter into contracts, as well as the substantive duty to fulfil a contractual promise so as to protect the other party involved in the contract, actualize itself as a member of the

some of her opinions', his engagement 'had been a continual source of disquiet and regret to him' (367), but Austen remains positive in affirming Edward's decision—even though the choice of the 'impersonal good' is now detrimental to a person's well being.

The climax of the clash between duty and love comes in Edward's sudden visit to Elinor when Lucy is in the house. Austen's use of the word 'engagement' has the effect of dramatic irony and double meaning: it brings out the crux of Edward's struggles, and the secret struggles between Elinor and Lucy. Marianne's praise of Edward intends to offend Lucy, but it also unintentionally foregrounds people's expectation of the dutiful subject (i.e. good people have choices, but people *expect* them to favor the noble ideal over personal preference—even though both may have equally substantive claims). When Marianne asks Edward, 'Why did you not come?', Edward replies,

'I was engaged elsewhere'.

'Engaged!—But what was that, when such friends were to be met?'

'Perhaps, Miss Marianne,' cried Lucy, eager to take some revenge on her, 'you think young men never stand upon engagements, if they have no mind to keep them, little as well as great.'...[Marianne] calmly replied,

'Not so, indeed; for, seriously speaking, I am very sure that conscience only kept Edward from Harley Street. And I really believe he *has* the most delicate conscience in the world; the most scrupulous in performing every engagement, however minute, and however it may make against his interest or pleasure. He is the most fearful of giving pain, of wounding expectation, and the most incapable of being selfish of anybody I ever saw. Edward, it is so and I will say it'.
(243-44)

Here, 'engagement' is the master-signifier that effectively relates the subject to other ordinary signifiers. It occupies a certain 'position of command'⁴¹ so that the listener (Edward) knows at once what he ought to do. Marianne's praise has the unwanted effect of reminding Edward of his duty to marry Lucy, or revealing his bad conscience. He should not approach Elinor while he is already bound to another.

society, abide by the contractual custom. A failed promise can only induce loss in the other, harm the reputation of the subject, rouse distrust to the smooth functioning of the contractual community, and damage its universal spirit. He particularly highlights all contracts related to marriage is more than a contract. In opposition to Kant's idea that marriage is merely a 'civil contract' (PR §163, 201), Hegel maintains that it is a unique union. A 'contract to transcend the standpoint of contract' (PR §163, 203).

This word also has the unintended effect of wounding Elinor for she is now the third party in this business of engagement. Marianne's faith in Edward's 'engagement-keeping' further mirrors the entrapment of an ethical character. Between an allegiance to a sound but personal choice, and the impersonal allegiance to a(n empty) contract, a hero is supposed to follow his duty and sacrifice his happiness. In the story, Edward loudly declares his (impersonal) choice of Lucy and quarrels with his mother.

The second clash between two equally valid claims comes in Edward's temptation to choose between contractual duty and social survival. Edward loudly spurns money for a noble cause. Austen invites her readers to admire the way an ethical subject dutifully risks (a social) death for the sake of virtue. Edward Ferrars is entirely dependent on his mother, and he understands that the 'noble' cause does not involve any noble substance (Lucy) at all. Austen is once again positive in her affirming the subject's fight for the abstract good at the expense of material needs. Her opinion is expressed through the free indirect discourse of Elinor and Marianne, who serves to draw readers to understand the value of Edward's action, and side with his rectitude.

Mrs Jennings was very warm in her praise of Edward's conduct, but only Elinor and Marianne understood its true merit. *They* only knew how little he had had to tempt him to be disobedient, and how small was the consolation, beyond the consciousness of doing right, that could remain to him in the loss of friends and fortune. Elinor gloried in his integrity; and Marianne forgave all his offences in compassion for his punishment (270).

In this passage, words like 'warm praise', 'gloried in his integrity', 'doing right', 'small consolation' immediately secure our admiration of the hero's moral statue. By laying bare the alternate possibility (Edward can behave differently) and using the Dashwood sisters to praise Edward for not choosing that alternative, the text brings us to ponder on the cost of ethical decision, and appreciate this knight of virtue. While many critics follow Marianne's perspective and complain about Elinor's love of impersonal, Other-oriented rules (decorum), few critics seem to notice that Edward's choice is equally impersonal and Other-oriented. Eventually, Edward is reduced to a state of painful anguish. At the internal level, the subject is alienated

⁴¹ Zizek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects" in *Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious*, ed. Zizek, 77.

between desire and deed. Edward knows he does not love Lucy, yet he willingly makes that tragic choice and says he wants to marry her. At the social level, the subject is alienated from the world. With his disinheritance, readers are led to understand that the world (even his brother) will reject Edward.

In this light, one can only observe the demand of impersonal ethics with awe: readers are pushed to realize that a depersonalized, ethical choice can bring a good man to an irreconcilable state of dejection, whereas the underdeveloped conscience (Willoughby) can constantly seek displacement and fun. Austen honors the ethical consciousness, but we are urged to feel the giving up of a rational (though personal) claim for a purely abstract claim (in return for nothing) is indeed the greatest test of one's moral fiber. Edward's choice earns him public recognition as a 'moral hero'; however, with poverty and an ill-natured fiancée as his potential reward, this choice only heightens his status as a 'victim' of his dutiful consciousness.

The dutiful subject's pathos is even more explicit in Austen's portrayal of the character Elinor. Elinor Dashwood neither enjoys any public acclaim as a moral hero, nor attracts people's pity as a victim. Chained by the confinement of gender roles and ethical consciousness, Austen reveals to us that a lady *cannot* struggle against the world in the same way as a man. In opposition to a man's loud resistance, a lady has to avoid being quarrelsome. While good men and women are buttressed by the same identification with impersonal principles, a woman is encouraged to mollify her dislike, or mask her feelings in a gentle, socially acceptable way. Austen presents how a good woman can have moral insight and make judgements (that is, Elinor can realize the nature of Robert Ferrars, and despise John Dashwood). However, a good woman also has an additional *forced* choice to make—to be womanly, supportive and decorous to all, including to those people she does not like. And this is where the term 'moral dissemblance' comes in. In the story, we are pushed to recognize another dilemma of the ethical, dissembling female subject: the *dual absence* of her own voice and her love of principles. In contradistinction to Edward's quarrels (an impersonal voice that originates from his faith in principles), Austen shows us that Elinor's 'ethical duty' bounds her to practice silence, euphemism, restraint or moral dissemblance. For example, the moment Lucy asks

Elinor of her opinion on Lady Middleton, Elinor is forced to give a deferential remark on Lady Middleton.

Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor, therefore, the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it always fell. She did her best, when thus called on, by speaking of Lady Middleton with more warmth than she felt, though with far less than Miss Lucy. (122)

Elinor does not tell her true feelings, but to be fair, neither can she be called a liar—for Elinor is like an actress who recites some feminine, socially prewritten expression. As a good woman, she cannot ‘conceive that [her] duty could be other than what [she] knows to be’ (PS 554).

If an ethical lady is guilty of not speaking the truth at all times, *Sense and Sensibility* leads us to see that it is an impersonal, ‘collective guilt’ decreed by a combination of gender, moral and class consciousness. Paternal education has disciplined little girls to be polite, mild creatures. Meanwhile, as young women grow up, to highlight their class status as ladies, they are put under strategic instruction in decorum to foreground social distinction (unless they are so well-established that they can violate the rules, like Mrs Ferrars). Marianne represents the ethical romantic’s exception from this rule for she opts to run away from all public discourse. While many young ladies—the Steeles and the Ferrars—practice their decorous virtues halfheartedly, Austen draws the reader’s attention to notice that a genuinely dutiful subject has almost no choice. She is bounded by class practice, moral principles and gender ideology to utter a polite, ‘prescribed discourse’. She speaks, yet her words are not really hers. It is a speech with its own set of rules (decorum, kindness, consideration and self-command), but it does not mirror the subject’s fundamental commitment to principles like truth or justice. It is in this sense that we can perceive the paradoxical choice and choicelessness, moral consciousness and moral dissemblance, voice and voicelessness of an ethical lady. Austen presents this gap throughout the novel using the technique of contrastive exposure—by contrasting Elinor’s dialogue and her consciousness through free indirect discourse. Elinor speaks to Lucy in her usual kindly manner:

‘Offend me! How could you suppose so? Believe me,’ and Elinor spoke it with the truest sincerity, ‘...Could you have a motive for the trust that was not honourable and flattering to me?’ (146)

But her true voice is presented in this way,

Elinor was soon called to the card-table....with the melancholy persuasion that...Edward had not even the chance of being tolerably happy in marriage,...for self-interest alone could induce a woman [Lucy] to keep a man to an engagement of which she seemed so thoroughly aware that he was weary. (151)

This free indirect discourse fully reveals the unfreedom of the moral lady: Elinor tries to be kind, and is not being hypocritical to others, but that does not mean that she is dumb. She cannot voice her true opinion—that would be unkindly, unwomanly, or even ‘socially-incorrect’, but readers understand that Elinor is aware of the truth: the true nature of Lucy’s affection, the true fate of Edward Ferrars, and her truly embarrassing situation in this love triangle. Modern readers are often puzzled by Austen’s insistence on presenting Elinor with a deeply hidden individuality and a ‘lack of individuality left over that can deflect [the subject] from the path of duty’ (PS §467, 281). And yet, if we examine the moral, gender and class pressure on a good woman at that time, we may have a clue to a woman’s paradoxical embrace of and discomfort with the behavioral codes at that time.

In the story, Austen highlights the fact that practicing the prescribed virtues earns Elinor nothing: Marianne looks down on and doubts Elinor’s integrity, and people like Lucy and John Dashwood constantly take advantage of the polite Elinor to get what they want. There is no heroic quarrel, no moral grandeur, or even intellectual consistency in the lady’s behavior. On the contrary, Austen foregrounds the vulnerability of the ethical lady as her highly *predictable* virtues can make her become the others’ prey in an immoral world. For example, Elinor is insulted by Fanny (she pointedly says Elinor is ‘a danger’ to Edward, a ‘young woman who attempted to draw him in’ 23), yet Elinor says nothing. Elinor puts up with the sociable Sir John, the cold Mrs Middleton, the inquisitive Mrs Jennings, the impudent and cunning Steeles, her calculating brother John Dashwood. She represses her dislike in order to remain on friendly terms with Lucy. While Marianne is straightforwardly confrontational, Elinor is not fond of making a scene (‘With

difficulty', Elinor tries to force Marianne to 'check her agitation', and restrain her from 'following [Willoughby]' in their first meeting in London [177-8]). With her adherence to the prescribed codes, she never talks back to her brother. To Lady Middleton, she tries to excuse Marianne's rudeness. To Lucy, even though 'Elinor was very angry', Elinor always says nothing. To Mrs Ferrars, who wants to take every opportunity to humiliate her and praises Miss Morton's art, Elinor does not fight back. It is Marianne who bravely declares, 'This is admiration of a very particular kind! What is Miss Morton to us?...It is Elinor of whom *we* think and speak' (235). Elinor always 'kept her concern and her censure to herself' (226).⁴² And if she wants to blame others, her retort is so mild that it has almost no effect at all. For example, Elinor responds to Robert Ferrars's joyful celebration of the fall of his brother in this way,

Elinor, while she waited in silence, and immovable gravity...[She] could not restrain her eyes from being fixed on [Robert Ferrars] with a look that spoke all the contempt it excited. It was a look, however, very well bestowed, for it relieved her own feelings, and gave no intelligence to him. He was recalled from wit to wisdom, not by any reproof of hers, but by his own sensibility. (298)

Under such circumstances, Austen's story shows us that duty can often lead a woman to a state of entrapment, or what Nardin calls 'social martyrdom'.⁴³ Elinor represents a helpless disciplined female subject in an immoral world: though her understanding is sharp, her lack of resistance can only subtly encourage the growth of injustice. Mooneyham has well pointed out the vulnerability of the virtuous lady:

Lucy's subversive use of language creates one opportunity after another for manipulating others. Because Lucy knows Elinor will not attempt to escape from the rules of polite talk, she is able to make Elinor her victim in each of their joint conversations. Elinor must counter Lucy's cruel innuendos as if she were unaware of Lucy's meaning: 'Elinor perfectly understood her and was forced to use all her self-command to make it appear that she did *not*' (217-8). Elinor's concealments and evasions are in compliance with the social

⁴² Apart from the prescribed altruism in the form of propriety or decorum, another way to explain Elinor's eternal forbearance is owing to her 'strategic necessity'. She probably knows the uselessness of confrontation when her whole family has so little bargaining power, so little support in terms of class rank, connections, or personal influence. Lady Middleton is their mother's relation and their patroness. However, this theory is not very tenable in Elinor's behavior to characters like John Dashwood or Robert Ferrars—for they give her nothing, and she has no need to please them.

⁴³ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums* 36.

regulations of her time and place; Lucy's lies result not from a concern with decorum but from selfishness and ambition.⁴⁴

It is not surprising that critics' responses differ dramatically in their evaluation of Elinor. For example, Duckworth finds Elinor an ethical character: 'Elinor's sense is neither a Machiavellian self-interest nor an emotionless calculation. In its affirmation of social principles it resembles, rather, the "early received and uniformly continued sense of mankind", which Burke considered had not only built up the "august fabric of states" but had continued to preserve it from ruin. Like her lover Edward, Elinor accepts the validity of social institutions and acts within received principles of ethical and social conduct. Against the private instinct of her sister, as against the selfish motivations of those around her,...[h]er withdrawal into a personal reserve is a committed withdrawal'.⁴⁵ Tara Wallace is more ambivalent in her remarks. Elinor can be 'accurate, perceptive, even witty, but at the same time...crabbed, unlikeable, unfeminine'.⁴⁶ Kenneth Moler is quite anti-Elinor for he dwells at length on Elinor's taking Marianne's disease lightly. And he concludes that Austen has used 'Marianne's illness to undermine the traditional position of the "sensible sister"'.⁴⁷ However, while critics may like or dislike Elinor, no critic will disagree on the extent of her ethical suffering. Her heroism is not noticeable, not known, or valued by everyone. Mrs Dashwood finally understands that she has been 'unjust, inattentive...unkind to her Elinor:—that Marianne's affliction, because more acknowledged, more immediately before her, had too much engrossed her tenderness, and led her away to forget that Elinor' is 'suffering almost as much' (356).

The crisis of ethical consciousness appears in another form in *Sense and Sensibility*. If Marianne speaks an empty speech and takes it as if it were original, the dutiful subject risks promoting an empty language—an *a*-personal 'small talk' without substance. As a critical dialogue always involves judgement and unkind comments, Austen's novel reveals the dilemma of the ethical subject in the choice between criticality and altruism—especially on public occasions. In public, they end

⁴⁴ Mooneyham, *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* 37.

⁴⁵ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 111.

⁴⁶ Wallace, "Sense and Sensibility and the Problem of Authority" *ECF* 4.2 1992, 160)

⁴⁷ Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Illusion* 72.

up saying nothing at all. Colonel Brandon is always altruistically sensitive to people's needs, and will forgo the pleasure of sensational gossip. Elinor is sharp in her private judgement, but she always tries to mollify Marianne's correct but harsh opinions, or divert Mrs Jennings's informative gossip in a social setting, and ends up talking about the weather. In private situations, the conversation among these subjects can be critical (hence a lot less altruistic) and substantially provoking. For example, Elinor can discuss the shortcoming of her sister's character with Brandon in private. Brandon can reveal to Elinor the real evil character of Willoughby. The private conversation between the Dashwood sisters can also be sharply critical: Marianne can question Elinor's attitude towards age (38), Elinor can challenge Marianne's conduct in her speedy relationship with Willoughby (47) or her ill-judged behavior of going to Allenham (69). However, in public, Elinor and Brandon are both fond of talking about the weather. The moment Margaret is about to reveal the identity of Elinor's lover, Colonel Brandon immediately pursues Mrs Middleton's comments on the rain. Colonel Brandon does that because he 'was on every occasion mindful of the feelings of others, and much was said on the subject of rain by both' Brandon and Elinor (62). With an altruistic spirit to support the dejected Edward, Elinor keeps up a 'discourse with him by talking of their present residence, its conveniences, etc., extorting from him occasional questions and remarks' (89).⁴⁸ Marianne has a great dislike towards this language—the small talk of 'the weather and the roads' is regarded by her to be 'reserved, spiritless, dull' (46).

However, Austen is positive in affirming this type of dissembling language. It is considerate, and it denotes the kind intention of the ethical subjects. Unlike the romantic language (which turns to be a reproduction of the romantic masters' sentiment), this discourse holds no pretence to any originality, or any intention to instruct, or shock. (However, Lacan interestingly tells us that this unoriginal discourse can be very significant if it occurs in emotionally intensive moments. On

⁴⁸ Mooneyham also differentiates between Elinor's public and private behavior: 'In public, Elinor undergoes the constant exertion of restraint. But in private, she is her own mistress. Elinor's is a purely internal freedom. ...There she is free to consider Edward as she wishes: 'Her mind was inevitably at liberty; her thoughts could not be chained elsewhere' (SS 105). Because Elinor forces herself to mix in society, where language is continually misapplied, abused and twisted, her internal

the surface, this language has no ambition to say anything important; but behind its deceptive insignificance, this language mirrors the subject's self-division, or the subject's psychological tension—desire, repetition, repression and trauma.) The ordinariness of this discourse hides the subject's attempt to face truth, like 'error taking flight in deception and recaptured by mistakes' (S1 273). In *Sense and Sensibility*, the speaking of truth is always barred to the subject. Principled minds cannot speak truth for social, or moral reasons. In the romantic context, 'Truth' is curiously not the subject's truth (for 'Truth' is dominated by the romantic master's hegemonic teachings. E.g. 'Love' or 'Nature' should be the way Cowper or Coleridge sees it). In that regard, a person can only get a glimpse of the unspeakable truth—a moment of great intensity—through a small, fragmented, unoriginal language. The moment language approaches the barred, much desired truth, the subject knows tension will arise, hence it wants to divert it using other topics. Thus, the sudden occurrence of diversionary small talk turns out to be the perfect indicator of the proximity to truth. Instead of being meaningless, small talk is inscribed in the text as truth under disguise (in this case, Elinor's barred love of Edward). In the story, Austen shows us that this kind of conversation is not valued by anyone, and only succeeds in winning the jeers of the heart-ruled subjects. With a single-minded pursuit of (the romantic master's) sentiments, Marianne assumes that Brandon can only talk about how 'in the East Indies the climate is hot, and the mosquitoes are troublesome' (49)—while Brandon's many enunciated efforts actually 'voice' his true desire to say that he loves her.

Austen foregrounds how an ethical subject can turn her docile duty to practice the politics of cynical, strategic *silence*. As paternal education, class practice and decorous rules have robbed a woman of her tongue to speak directly, (rudely,) and honestly, Elinor turns her restraint into a cynical silence to observe the Other, to maximize her panoptic gaze on the world, and to recognize the contradiction between an untold knowledge and her dissemblance. In silence, Elinor sees the faults of her mother and Marianne, observes Mrs Ferrars's snobbish habits, reflects on Edward's predicament, despises Lucy's hypocrisy, re-evaluates Willoughby's merits

freedom of thought is her last preserve of linguistic purity' (*Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* 39)

and demerits, re-apprises Mrs Jennings's character, and analyses her own plight. Austen always uses this strategic silence as a focal point to guide readers to read her text, and pass judgment. For example, it is through Elinor's perspective that we are able to judge John Dashwood (a representative of the early capitalist): he has 'just compunction enough for having done nothing for his sisters himself, to be exceedingly anxious that everybody else should do a great deal' as a 'means of atoning for his own neglect' (228). If Elinor's failure to speak up at the crucial moment alienates readers from her, Austen also brings us to ponder on the value of a strategic, dissembling silence. First, instead of making conclusive speeches (e.g. Marianne's firm opinions on Brandon, Willoughby, Nature), silence can allow the subject to make interpretations and revisions. Second, through a careful 'listening' to the other's language, the subject can hear back the message in an inverted form so as to witness the gap in the Other's speeches. Elinor's critical, silent listening always leads her to identify at once the inconsistency and the fallacy of her mother's arguments. Her mother says that she has long noticed something in Willoughby's eyes that she does not like (338). She is sure that Marianne 'would never have been so happy with [Willoughby] as she will be with Colonel Brandon'. Elinor 'could not remember' her mother making such a comment on Willoughby. She 'could not quite agree' with her mother's comments on Brandon. To the end of the novel, Elinor remains the only one who believes Willoughby would be a more compatible companion to Marianne than Brandon. However, as 'her dissent was not heard', therefore she 'gave no offence' (338).

* * *

In no other novel has Austen foregrounded the failure of ethical consciousness. Edward has done nothing wrong, yet if not for the help of Colonel Brandon, he would have lost everything—money, status, family, friends, his fiancée (Lucy), and the power to marry his Elinor (due to insufficient income). Ethical consciousness fails to bring authentic reconciliation between the subjects and the world: Edward and Elinor cannot truly reconcile with Mrs Ferrars. In the Ferrars family, 'Edward was never cordially forgiven for having once intended to marry [Lucy], and Elinor, though superior to [Lucy] in fortune and birth, was spoken of as an intruder' (377). The tragic fact is that though duty aims to 'receive a true reality by nullifying

individuality' (PS §383, 230), it only forces the subject to live a life of isolation. However, Austen's contrast between Elinor/Edward and Lucy/Robert Ferrars makes readers understand that even though dutiful consciousness does not work, it is still better than the corrupted ways of the world. Robinson has summarized the tragic impasse of the ethical consciousness well:

The tragedy of the moral point of view is that it does not work, and the blasted hopes and twisted lives caused by an effort to live it are fully as meaningless as the physical destruction of the Terror. But the only man who can become a man of conscience is one who has striven to realize what the moral view of the world has sought to make real, one who has experienced the limitation, the dissemblance, and the hypocrisy of morality because he has tried to be moral. Those who content themselves with cheap jibes about principles or uninformed remarks...who, in short, try to take short cuts to conscience because duty is not fashionable will never, in Hegel's view, understand even their own chatter about integrity and the necessity of acting in accordance with their own nature.⁴⁹

Eventually, Austen arranges a strange twist of fate in order that her subjects can enjoy happiness and reconciliation. Austen weaves her plot to foreground a cynical realism that forwards her happy ending (bad people will win!). The triumph of evil achieves what virtue does not. The ironic correctness of Mrs Jennings's (totally erroneous) prophecy perfectly mirrors the cunning, invisible hand of unreason. At the end of the novel, Austen writes, 'Mrs Jennings's prophecies, though rather jumbled together, were chiefly fulfilled; for she was able to visit Edward and his wife in their parsonage by Michaelmas, and she found in Elinor and her husband, as she really believed, one of the happiest couples in the world' (374). However, Mrs Jennings' rationale does not work in this way at all. In the beginning, Mrs Jennings reckons that Marianne would marry Willoughby, Elinor would marry Edward. After she knows of Marianne's sad affair, and Edward's affair with Lucy, Mrs Jennings then predicts that Brandon will marry Elinor, and Marianne will die of a broken heart. However, Austen's cynical reason leads her to ironically plan the victory of evil characters as the cause of happy endings. Eliza dies, hence Brandon is free to enjoy his second attachment without any violation of (emotional) integrity. Willoughby's hedonism leads to his ruin, and Mrs Smith's threat compels him to

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind* 101.

realize his heartfelt desire to marry for money instead of love. He jilts Marianne for a rich girl. Marianne is thus free to marry someone else. Mrs Ferrars's anger at disinheriting Edward succeeds in rousing Brandon's sense of justice, and Brandon provides Edward with a living and paves the way for Elinor's future in Delaford. Lucy's attempt to keep Edward leads to her contact with Robert, as well as to her victorious conquest of Robert's heart. And Lucy and Robert's mutual ridicule or rejection of Edward helps build a solid foundation for their treacherous love. All in all, these 'immoral' moves contribute to the happy ending. Brandon is free and Marianne is disillusioned. Brandon deserves to have Marianne after his sufferings. Marianne's abandonment by her love brings forth the enlightened growth which allows her to understand the value of Brandon. Edward is free and morally clear of any blame. Elinor is free to marry Edward without the tarnish of selfishness.

In the final analysis, the victory of the undutiful couple (Lucy forfeits her promise to marry Edward, Robert forfeits his duty to his mother to turn Lucy out from the Ferrars family) further accelerates the speed of reconciliation. Mrs Ferrars is afraid of losing both of her sons, and 'after a proper resistance...just so violent and so steady as to preserve her from that reproach...of being too amiable, Edward was admitted to her presence, and pronounced to be again her son' (373). In a cynical way, Austen's story shows us that 'unreason' helps provide the perfect condition for the growth of an immature mind, the revelation of evil hearts, the union of moral couples. Austen cherishes no illusions in the victory of ethics, or ethical people. All her ethical subjects are excluded from the old centers of civilization. Norland is still occupied by the greedy John Dashwood, and Mrs Ferrars's prestigious abode is dominated by quarrelsome couples. When it comes to the distribution of resources and rewards, Austen shows that the world functions with injustice and unfairness. Edward gets nothing, and his brother is awarded for his wickedness—he gets money, a wife and his mother's pardon. Lucy is rewarded for her flattery and treachery. She becomes Mrs Ferrars's favorite daughter.

Austen writes that many people 'puzzle' over why Edward can be disinherited and happy; however, Austen notes that relative poverty has little effect on the state of the ethical mind. Edward becomes a very happy man and defies the wealth of his brother with a 'regular cheerfulness of his spirits' (377). It is only at the very end that

Austen strives to disillusion her readers, and modify this (fantasmal) moral fullness with a bitter note of reality: the persistence of lack. The strong presence of love, ethical consciousness and class security *cannot* guarantee total harmony among people. Human relationships will never follow the pattern of literary artifice. While immoral people will be punished by their immoral values, moral people cannot avoid domestic quarrels, or the ups and downs in human relationships. Austen suggests that human relationships will always be in lack of something. Hence 'Mrs Dashwood was prudent enough to remain at the cottage, without attempting a removal to Delaford', or practicing the 'grand union' in storybooks. While the wicked ones can never enjoy peace (John and Fanny Dashwood, Robert and Lucy Ferrars quarrel incessantly), between the two virtuous couples, they still suffer from a lack of harmony at times. Thus, Austen writes, 'among the merits and happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between husbands' (380).

Chapter 4: The Problem of the Other in *Pride and Prejudice*

I am not prejudging what the other is. I simply emphasize the lures of one's fellow man because it is from this fellow as such that the misrecognitions which define me as a self are born. (S7 198).

For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn? (PP 364)

Austen's novels have always conveyed to us the modern idea that in the center of every human subject there is a relationship. We have witnessed how Austen destroys an illusory individualism by pinpointing the subject's engagement with language; in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen highlights the way in which the subject's intrinsic relatedness to the Other has prompted it to desire and reject the neighbor at the same time. Pride is necessarily related to the Other because 'it is from this fellow as such that the misrecognitions which define me as a self are born' (S7 198). And prejudice is a natural consequence: the subject-in-other, with its specular (misrecognized) autonomy, must come to slight the other. In this regard, Austen suggests that enlightenment is not confined to the attainment of virtues, reason or cultural accomplishment. Her story particularly draws the readers' attention to the fact that knowledgeable, accomplished and rational subjects have as much pride and prejudice as the ignorant subjects. Given the fact that pride and prejudice are linked to the question of identity, true enlightenment is ultimately founded on the re-cognition of the self, on the releasement of the Other, and reconciliation with differences.

Almost all critics notice the reconciliatory note in *Pride and Prejudice*. Duckworth's opinion summarizes many critics' views on this book: i.e. it is satisfying because it features how 'the best solution, clearly, is neither society alone, nor self alone, but self-in-society, the vitalized reconstitution of a social totality, the dynamic compromise between past and present'.¹ In the course of Austen studies, the debate is centered on the nature of this 'dynamic compromise': many critics consider this novel to be the most subversive of Austen's works. For example, Mark Schorer argues that *Pride and Prejudice* mirrors Austen's progressive view on social mobility: how 'a formerly depressed class' moves 'into a position of power, and 'a

¹ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 142.

formerly powerful class into a position of compromise'.² Samuel Klinger says Austen is on the side of the 'natural' Elizabeth, a 'revolutionary' heroine. The movement of the book is one of compromise and mutual instruction, as Elizabeth learns the importance of class, while Darcy comes to share 'Elizabeth's genius for treating all people with respect for their natural dignity' (367).³ Claudia Johnson believes that *Pride and Prejudice* is radically subversive as Elizabeth's choice—poverty instead of improper financial security—bespeaks a woman's independent spirit. D.J. Greene modifies the novel's optimism by qualifying Elizabeth's progressiveness. Elizabeth is a 'Tory radical' with a strong anti-aristocratic bias⁴. But not all critics share this subversive view. Walter Scott teasingly says that Elizabeth is not as radical as the world believes. Elizabeth likes Darcy because she has seen 'Pemberley'. Her 'prudence' begins to subdue her 'prejudice' (194).⁵ Kenneth Moler traces back the novel's origin and concludes that it is in no way revolutionary. It is constructed along the Richardson-Burney tradition: Darcy is a 'patrician hero', the poor but high-spirited lady is destined to marry the wealthy aristocrat after the literary examples of *Sir Charles Grandison* or *Pamela*. Marilyn Butler further argues that 'the more one examines the novel the more difficult it becomes to read into it authorial approval of the element in Elizabeth which is rebellious'.⁶ Austen actually 'disidentifies' with Elizabeth: 'The trouble with *Pride and Prejudice* is that many readers do not perceive just how critical the author is of Elizabeth's way of thinking'.⁷ Howard Babb follows this view to argue that Austen regards Elizabeth's rebelliousness to be dangerous. Elizabeth prefers 'wit' to justice. Hence Austen is on the side of Darcy and his scrupulous verbal accuracy. Darcy points out the 'dangerous spirits' of Elizabeth: she has 'great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which are not [her] own'.⁸ W.A. Craik links Austen's approval of Darcy with ideological conservatism: 'one of the first qualities to make him seem a possible husband is that

² Mark Schorer, "Introduction to the Laurel Jane Austen" (New York 1961), p.8 quoted from Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 202.

³ Klinger, "Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in the Eighteenth-Century Mode," *University of Toronto Quarterly* xvi (1947), 362.

⁴ Greene, "Jane Austen and the Peerage", *PMLA* lxxviii 1953, 1017-31.

⁵ Walter Scott, *Quarterly Review*, xiv (1815), 194.

⁶ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 203.

⁷ *Ibid.* 216.

⁸ Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue*, 129.

[Darcy] is a perfect landlord'⁹, and Duckworth mentions that 'Darcy has a Burkean regard for the wisdom of his ancestors'.¹⁰

In this reading, my intention is to show that Austen believes that *all* people—conservative or subversive, moral or immoral—are enslaved by pride and prejudice. Pride and prejudice are usually misrecognized as 'personal' problems; as a result, what many critics have done is to 'institutionalize' these sentiments, link them with the nineteenth-century class structure, or Burkean ideology, and focus the debate on Austen's identification with 'conservative' class pride or 'subversive' middle-class prejudice. While this explanation is neat and convenient, it seems to have neglected the way in which small people—who belong to the same class (like Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins, Mrs Gardiner, or Lady Lucas)—are equally wrought with the problem of pride and prejudice. In fact, 'class' cannot explain the prevalence of pride and prejudice: it may help heighten their expression, but the formation of pride and prejudice is due to the structure of the self, which is inextricably linked to the question of the Other.

Hegel postulates that the self will naturally fight the Other-consciousness within 'me' in order to assert a unifying, prideful subjectivity. One century later, Lacan 'denaturalizes' this conflictual relationship between the self and the other-in-me by foregrounding the complex birth of the subject. From the age of 3-6, the child gradually surrenders its autonomy to the paternal Other. While language inscribes the child as a subject within a particular enunciating or subject position, it merely introduces a 'symbolic difference' through which the child perceives people (as 'president', 'office assistant'). Enmity arises when the subject re-enacts the fusional and ambivalent logic of the Imaginary. First, the subject fuses itself with *one* entity (which occupies 'the other function' in the mirror stage—the neighbor, an inferior schoolmate, a class position) to mirror its (misrecognized) superiority or unity, to attain a sense of identity (*moi*). But behind the 'lures' of fellow human beings and this fusional identification, there exists an aggressive dimension in which the subject, to heighten its identity or 'genuine' superiority, would like to maintain the present status quo. In other words, the subject cannot posit itself without the Other; however,

⁹ Craik, *Jane Austen in her Time* (London: Nelson, 1969), 68.

¹⁰ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 129.

for the sake of defending its (imaginary) Onenes, the subject feels it *has to* repress the rise or improvement of the (inferior) other, to proudly find fault with family members, assert its ascendancy, and problematize the person that shares even the *same* ideological or class belief.

Lacan attributes this to the question of 'extimacy'. To reduce it to a simple concept, extimacy refers to the situation in which the subject fights the other-in-me because of a fight for *jouissance*. The extimate self (the self is doubly excenterized by the other in the mirror stage and by the Other in the symbolic stage) has to find fault with its sibling or neighbor because it longs to have the unifying *jouissance* that it has long lost after birth. Pride comes as soon as the subject acquires an imaginary sense of unity, and prejudice emerges and is directed at fellow beings because 'it is founded on what one imagines about the Other's *jouissance*; it is hatred of the particular way, of the Other's own way, of experiencing *jouissance*'.¹¹ To explain this situation clearly: the subject fails to have the lost primordial *jouissance*, and after seeing the neighbor's enjoyment, the subject imagines that this different person must have a strange source of joy it cannot have, and dislikes this person. The combat of *jouissance* is so intense that the subject (in lack) even comes to prejudicially think that the neighbor has 'stolen' its enjoyment, hence causing its present unhappiness. In this way, race, class or ideology is not the ultimate cause that leads to the formation of pride or prejudice. Pride and prejudice cut across class, race or ideological boundaries and can occur among friends, at family, intra or inter-class levels. White people have their Caucasian pride, but black people also have their black power. The rich have their pride, but the poor have their moral dignity. But this (imaginary) fullness on both sides does not stop them from antagonizing each other, or people in their own group. As Miller puts it, 'true intolerance is the intolerance of the Other's *jouissance*' (80). The subject, with its love of superiority (pride) and frustrating lack, will prejudicially refuse to tolerate the value of the neighbor—'either he does not work or he does not work enough, or he is useless or he is a little too useful' (ibid). And people justify this intolerance of the neighbors because of the others' organization of enjoyment, 'precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains

¹¹ Miller, "Extimité" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse, Subject and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 79

to this way: the smell of “their” food, “their” noisy songs, and dances, “their” strange manners, “their” attitude to work’ (TN 203). Hence, Miller’s words best elucidate the endless conflicts in human relationship: ‘no decision, no will, no amount of reasoning is sufficient’ to wipe out the antagonism between the self and the other because ‘it is founded on the point of extimacy’: a paradoxical situation in which the subject’s identity is processed through a necessary dependency on the other and its desire to conquer others and reach a state of absolute (illusory) independence.¹²

Owing to the *lack* of love for the other, the subject will always pursue a deliberate misrecognition of people (prejudice), and congratulate itself on its self-misrecognizing wholeness (pride)—citing whatever (class, ideological, racial, cultural, rational or irrational) reason to justify its stance. In the novel, Austen has tried her best to enlighten and unite a couple. However, the persisting question of the Other is so fundamental that she implies that total reconciliation is impossible. In this sense, *Pride and Prejudice* is neither conservative nor subversive, but *pessimistic*. Austen does not identify with either Elizabeth or Darcy—instead, she simply unveils a truth that Miller, in the 20th century, describes in a completely different vocabulary: ‘no decision, no will, no amount of reasoning is sufficient’ to wipe out the conflicts among human beings. Austen anticipates Lacan’s theory by implying that the erasure of pride and prejudice is difficult due to the subject’s love of fullness (in Lacanian terms, the lost *jouissance*). In the end, Austen has cynically arranged a ‘false love of the Other’ to hasten her happy ending. Such false love turns out to be an ideologized, fantasmal regard for the Other so that the subject can hide the spectacles of aggressivity and greed.

* * *

The novel singles out the fact that gentry society is a gregarious society, full of (Burkean) fantasies of national and social harmony, though the genuine recognition of the Other is a rare thing. The landed gentry class adopts a life of ‘compulsory socializing’, but with a heavy emphasis on the display of personal and class hierarchy. Burke particularly highlights the possibility of a gregarious but unequal community. In his *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*, he says ‘it has been the uniform of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an entailed

¹² Miller, “Extimité” 79.

inheritance' to preserve 'property and rank implanted in our nature' (245). He appeals to the 'natural basis' for hierarchy and believes that English landed gentry estate 'tends...to the perpetuation of the society itself' (140). The state is a naturally 'unequal' and 'harmonious' society with 'different descriptions of men (291), like the 'so many different species of animals' (299). In this way, we might as well see that Austen's ballroom can be a microcosmic mirror of (Burkean) 'natural', unequal but 'harmonious' exchange in the gentry class. It aims at the display of 'hereditary possession', but also at attaining social unity while the rich can enjoy a greater 'share of power, authority, and direction...in the management' of various resources (150).

Austen's novels often ironize this insistence on sociality and 'harmonious inequality'. And the mask of (Burkean) unity often fails to hide the subjects' eagerness to show (off) their hierarchical differences. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet proudly retorts to Mr Darcy that 'as to not meeting with many people in this neighborhood, I believe there are few neighborhoods larger. I know we dine with four and twenty families' (43). This 'vulgar' speech directly invites laughter from the upper gentry class. However, the reason why this language is classified as 'vulgar' or punishable owes not so much to its impudence, but to its honest exposure of the (in)delicate, unequal class mechanism. Mrs Bennet's words lay bare the 'forbidden' discourse as they expose the determining condition and the criterion of 'gentry respectability' at that time. To be able to dine with a large number of families implies a substantial, if not superior, command of social, personal and financial resources, and this can undoubtedly mirror the family's class standing, or its influence in the neighborhood. By mentioning the unspeakable (in a class context), these 'vulgar' words actually exposes how class respectability is constructed through the alliance of money, sociality and food. Though the Other plays a crucial role in life, Austen's story directs us to see that there is no lack of antagonism in a closely-knit neighborhood. The Bingley sisters lose no time in laughing at Mrs Bennet's mistake. And in the story, Meryton represents a prototypical dynamic community in which people can be unforgiving, with class affinity, competition, neighborly aid and struggles existing side by side.

Austen's ironic language foregrounds the simultaneous inclusion/exclusion, and the deliberate recognition/misrecognition of the Other in a competitive society. As

self-interest guides the mind to sometimes perceive people as ‘useful objects’, it eclipses any true desire to know the Other. Austen uses dialogues to heighten the reduction of the wealthy new neighbor to a sensational entity in a cooperative and competing neighborhood. From the Bennets’ conversation, we know that the Longbourn neighborhood is cooperative in the sense that the coming of a new family is quickly announced by Mrs Long to Mrs Bennet. However, this piece of news also rouses quick responses and immediate competition in Meryton. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney cites the panoptic, omniscient power of ‘neighborhood watch’ for crime deterrence, or normalization of individual behavior, or for communal stability. But in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen unveils this ‘neighborhood watch’ as the origin of communal disharmony or enmity. By the time Mrs Bennet informs Mr Bennet of Mr Bingley’s renting the Netherfield, Mrs Bennet knows that ‘Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go’ and visit Mr Bingley upon his arrival, though ‘in general...they visit no new comers’ (4). Owing to the fact that Mrs Long has ‘two nieces of her own’ to compete with Jane or Elizabeth, Mrs Long is immediately (mis)recognized by Mrs Bennet as a ‘selfish, hypocritical woman’ (6). And the moment Mrs Bennet hears the name ‘Bingley’, a rich and single young man, Mr Bingley is fantasized as having only one ‘husband’ function: to marry off one of her daughters. It is in this sense that *the Other is simultaneously included and excluded, and the Other is deliberately misrecognized and not allowed to be the true Other*. Hence the famous opening line of the novel is about Mrs Bennet or Mrs Lucas’ maternal anxiety, but it is also about the eternal misreading of the Other as the subject imposes its desires and perception on people. Austen mocks the commonness of misrecognizing the Other in the form of an aphorism: ‘It is a *truth* universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife’ (3). As readers punctuate the text, we are invited to ponder on and critique this ‘universal truth’, i.e. the eagerness of mothers to commodify their daughters, the belief that a rich man needs a wife (while the poor man may forget the idea). But more importantly, readers are asked to notice the preconceived distortion of the Other for the sheer advancement of self-interest. This is the ultimate ‘universal truth’. Regardless of what that single young man thinks, everybody believes that ‘a single man in possession of a good fortune *must be* in want of a wife’ (3). Austen’s

ironic truism drives us to notice that the subject's arbitrary reading of the Other can be disrespectful and aggressive. The Other is reduced to a 'thing', a 'property' to be manipulated by people.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters (3).

Mr Bennet understands his wife's thoughts, and protests that a young man may not be thinking of marriage in his renting a house. In the novel, Austen employs a contrastive male perspective to concur with, contradict and play with a nervous woman's ambition in the social realm. Mr Bennet 'had always intended to visit [Mr Bingley]' (6) but he never says a word about it. While he tacitly cooperates with Mrs Bennet's plan, the acerbic question he asks from time to time ('Is that his design in settling here?') helps challenge her mercenary desire, and remind the readers of the violence of maternal wishful-thinking. Despite Mrs Bennet's protest against the word 'design', she has indeed planned that Bingley should be Jane's husband, and adopted various strategies to forward this design. Mrs Bennet's excessive love for this particular neighbor is showered with 'officious attention' (337), 'anxious designs' (338). With her 'happy schemes' (339), Mrs Bennet has violently and forcefully made Bingley fit into her fantasmal idea of the Other.

Pride and Prejudice also unmasks the cause of the subject's antagonism towards the Other. Many critics take 'class pride' to be the factor in the novel which most determines the formation of prejudices. For example, David Monaghan says that the middle class 'accepts the common view that aristocrats are worthless snobs', and the aristocrats and the upper gentry class believe 'that anyone connected with trade must be vulgar and unworthy of respect'.¹³ However, this convenient statement may not be true. Lizzy does not have any initial preconceived hatred of the aristocrat (in fact, the whole Meryton society is thrilled to see Darcy at first). In addition, though class-consciousness can introduce hierarchy to the mind (rich/poor, ugly/beautiful), this 'symbolic' difference does not necessarily imply interpersonal 'antagonism', as Mr Knightley so well demonstrates to us in *Emma*. In the story, Austen leads us to see that 'insecurity'—the *fear of lack*—is the quickest way to rouse prejudice among

people. In terms of class origin, the Bingleys and the Bennets are both of the landed gentry class, connected with trade.¹⁴ Mrs Bennet's brother—Mr Gardiner—is a merchant, Mr Bingley's father made his fortune 'by trade'. They belong to the second group according to Mingay's category.¹⁵ At first, Miss Bingley has a particular regard for Jane Bennet; however, once she learns of Darcy's admiration of Elizabeth's 'fine eyes', her enmity towards the Bennets reaches new heights. Of the three excuses used by Miss Bingley to hurt Elizabeth, Austen leads us to see that the denigration of the Other is often motivated by the subject's intense fear of lack, and a deep intolerance of the Other's possible enjoyment (i.e. of having Darcy).

In reaction to feelings of insecurity, the first strategy used by the subject is to attribute to the self a(n imaginary) fullness that it, in fact, does not have. As the Bingley sisters talk, they happily mention the uncles and aunts of the Bennet family to hint at the 'vulgar relations' of the Bennets. Mrs Hurst claims that she loves her neighbor, she has 'an excessive regard' for Jane Bennet, but she joyfully foregrounds the 'low connections' of the family (36). The sisters' dialogue becomes more gratifying as it becomes more abusive.

'I think I have heard you say, that their uncle is an attorney in Meryton.'

'Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside.'

'This is capital,' added her sister, and they both laughed happily. (36-7)

Austen punctuates and interrupts her text with this gap of cruel laughter; by doing so, she pushes readers to explore the nonverbal, un-said subtext in the two ladies' happiness. The intended message 'defines' the lowliness of the Bennets by relating them to their cousins' inferior geographical abode; however, readers can see that the latent message actually wants to emphasize intra-class difference, link it to marital

¹³ Monaghan, *Jane Austen, Structure and Social Vision* 66.

¹⁴ I owed this point to Dr Irvine and his comments on this draft, September, 2001.

¹⁵ Duckworth quotes G.E. Mingay's *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* and follows his idea to categories three large groups of great landowners, lesser landowners, and free-holders. Great landowners are defined as having a big house, a London residence, with at least £5000 a year, and about 10000 to 20000 acres. Only Darcy is rich enough to belong to this group. Bingley with his £4000 to £5000 a year is rich, but his money is made in trade and can only belong to the second group. Mingay subdivides the second group into three types, wealthy gentry (£3000 to £5000 per annum), squires (£1000 to £3000), and gentlemen (£300 to £1000). The Bennets are living to the limit of the Longbourn income (£2000). If Mr Bennet dies, and the estate goes to Mr Collins, their £5000 will provide a mere £250 a year, a marginal figure for keeping a small family in a position of gentility. (*The Improvement of the Estate* 87)

barriers, and express a self-congratulated fullness (i.e. *they* do not have such relations, they can marry well). It aims at savoring a class and marital security that the Bingleys in fact do not have. Bingley's (dead) father lived by trade, had no estate of his own, but his father's case tells us that a man with money can always transgress marital barriers and marry a woman of a respectable family in the north of England (15). On the other hand, space is no indicator of a person's cultural manners. Mr Gardiner 'lived within view of his own warehouses', but is perfectly 'well bred and agreeable' (139). By conveniently forgetting the possibility of social mobility and individual acculturation, the Bingley sisters exaggerate their secure status.

The second strategy aims at highlighting the inadequacy, the lack, of the Other. In the story, Miss Bingley turns to a 'cultural' denigration of Lizzy through the notion of an 'accomplished lady'. Lizzy doubts the possibility of the existence of a lady who can 'have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages', 'a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions' (39). This is in turn attributed by Caroline Bingley as a mark of her confinement in an inferior cultural society. *She* knows many women who can answer this description. Elizabeth is 'rationally' deduced to be an 'artful' lady. Her words are condemned by Miss Bingley as 'a paltry device, a very mean art', used by those (desperate) young ladies who try to trap men—for they 'seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own' (40). Eventually, the story draws us to notice that, while Miss Bingley uses class and cultural reasons to 'justify' her dislike of the 'lowly Elizabeth', her prejudice is actually founded on a fear of Lizzy, which prompts her to undertake a deliberate (mis)reading of the Other in order to assert herself. The third strategy directly exposes the aggressive hatred of the Other—which is not so much related to class or culture, but to competition and an intolerance of the Other's enjoyment. Everything about Lizzy (her independence, her *jouissance*) is deliberately *mis*recognized by Miss Bingley as a violation of her idea of appropriateness: her petticoat is too dirty, her wit is imprudence, her skin is 'too brown and coarse' (270). In the end, discarding all class or cultural or rational pretense, Miss Bingley comes up with this fine specimen of explaining her hatred of the Other.

'For my own part...I must confess that I never could see any beauty in her. Her face is too thin; her complexion has no brilliancy; and her

features are not at all handsome. Her nose wants character; there is nothing marked in its lines. Her teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way; and as for her eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I never could perceive any thing extraordinary in them. They have a sharp shrewish look, which I do not like at all; and in her air altogether, there is a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable.' (271).

In the 19th century philosophical context, Hegel had already noticed that the conflict with the Other is inextricably linked to the foundation of the self. And this problem reaches its climax in the master-slave relationship. Hegel openly challenges the Cartesian autonomy of the subject and says 'self-consciousness exists in and for itself for an other' (PS §178, 111). However, as the subject will hold on to an illusory autonomy (pride), it will refuse to accept the Other-in-me. Hence, Hegel theorizes an antagonistic stage—a 'life and death struggle'—as the subject must fight the Other.

The relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won. (PS §187, 113-4).

To Hegel, the fierce struggle between two equally strong-willed subjects can be a positive development. It allows the subject to attain 'the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness'. However, if there is a notable difference between the two parties, this stage quickly passes on to the establishment of a hierarchical relationship. The winner of this struggle receives Life, enjoys the pure being-for-itself and becomes the master. The master's refusal to recognize the (lesser) Other as a valuable person eventually leads the master to negate the less fortunate person to a state of nonbeing, a slave. Hegel reckons that 'love' is the only reconciliatory force that can draw the self and the Other into mutual recognition.

Love means in general terms the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not in selfish isolation but win my self-consciousness only as the renunciation of my independence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me...Love, therefore, is the most tremendous contradiction; the Understanding cannot resolve it since there is nothing more stubborn than this point of self-consciousness which is negated and which nevertheless I ought to possess as affirmative. Love is at once the propounding and the resolving of this

contradiction. As the resolving of it, love is unity of an ethical type.
(PR §158A 199).

In Robert R. Williams's words, 'love renounces domination and mastery because it finds intrinsic worth in its object'.¹⁶ Hegel postulates that love is the legitimate way to recognize the importance of the Other as the subject renounces dominance ('I do not wish to be a self-subsistent and independent person') and seeks reciprocal recognition ('I find myself in another person,...while the Other in turn comes to count for something in me' (PR §158A 199). In love, Hegel theorizes that the subject does not lose its 'selfhood', but reconciles its particular consciousness with the Other, and can enjoy unity in differences. Thus, he believes, '[t]he ethical aspect of marriage consists in the parties' consciousness of this unity as their substantive aim, and so in their love, trust and common sharing of their entire existence as individuals' (PR §163 203).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen dramatizes a civil 'life and death struggle' between two masters, and the fight for truth described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*. 'Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet are extremely mature masters by the time they meet'.¹⁷ Owing to their self-certainty of 'truth', these two mature subjects are not likely to yield to anybody, for their pride is buttressed by master-signifiers like 'objectivity', 'observation', and 'moral sympathy'. In fact, I shall argue that Darcy and Elizabeth's mature thoughts represent the totalizing ambitions of empirical and moral philosophy, in which the subjects employ their specific frameworks to read the world. The discourse of the master, 'by reason of its pretension to articulate truth', can lead a person to aspire 'to an analogous power' and autonomy (S7 43). In the story, it is expressed in the form of a 'judicial pride' in making 'objective judgement', and a 'moral pride' in possessing 'sympathy'. Austen challenges the justifiability of these masters' beliefs—by highlighting the gap in their discourses, by demolishing their fantasmal totality or correctness. Darcy is emphatically portrayed as a 'benevolent' master who cannot even behave in a 'gentlemanly' way, or have any humane 'feeling of remorse'. Lizzy is characterized as an analytical, sympathetic lady blinded by her unexamined moral stance.

¹⁶ Williams, *Recognition*, 181.

¹⁷ Monaghan, *Jane Austen, Structure and Social Vision* 65.

Eventually, *Pride and Prejudice* pushes readers to reject these masters' illusory self-determinacy. Genuine enlightenment can only begin by understanding the value of the Other, hence the subject can retroactively 'receive' its self. Gary Handwerk's words on Lacanian subjectivity can best capture the message of *Pride and Prejudice*,

this indirection in the process of knowing self is essential, because the self's knowledge of itself is always incomplete. Personal significations are elided from articulated truth that seems smooth to the subject, so that even self-revelation is deceptive, already bound up in a system of values that justify whatever is revealed. To see that one is an egoist is not at all the same as to see where and how one is an egoist....Only when that self-revelation is articulated back to the subject and thus defined in a more precise way does it become effective self-knowledge.....

The truth about the subject emerges from interrogation, from without. External vision, in its divergences from self-image, forces the reassessment and revision for the subject....[T]he full force of...self-recognition emerges only from direct questioning by another person.¹⁸

Austen first questions Darcy's system of signifiers. The master's 'Truth', 'observation', or 'judgement' is based not only on a (better) understanding of the world but also from the construction of realities through an *invisible knowledge*. This invisible system of knowledge is powerful for it operates on a hidden agenda, and systematically filters, totalizes, and hierarchizes everything according to one signifying apparatus in a position that is special to the subject (e.g. the newcomer is to be rejected if he looks ignorant). To Mark Bracher, 'these invisible links...make up the network of the subject's pleasure and pain, likes and dislikes, allies and enemies, etc., and thus constitute the subject's sense of itself'.¹⁹ In that regard, the master's judgement is essentially not entirely objective, but a(n experiential, intuitive, rational) framework—mediated through an authoritative language—within which what is truth and untruth, who should be welcomed, censured and who should not can be determined. In the opening of the novel, Darcy first draws his 'empirical knowledge' of the Meryton society in an irritated mood. Given the fact that Darcy is not fond of frivolous social functions, this impression becomes an 'invisible link' to make up the network of his displeasure, his dislike of the Meryton residents, and his

¹⁸ Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics In Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan* 105-6.

¹⁹ Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse, Subject and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 110.

alliance with old friends (he talked and danced only with the Bingleys). However, the master's ability to connect all things 'in a reasoned relation' (S12 32) helps rationalize his prejudiced enunciating position. Meryton is 'insupportable'(11)—it is an 'empirical observation' that Darcy holds to be true as he keeps on collecting information about the local people, and overhearing Mrs Bennet's dialogue with others.

In the story, Austen dethrones the master's judicial pride by highlighting the gaps in its discourses. The first gap is that, although the master discourse apparently claims to be devoted to understanding the world through an 'impartial observation', it is not as impartial as it hopes, and it functions to promote the various signifiers that favor and consolidate its class or ideological status. In turn, though the master begins with a pseudo-neutral (empirical) position, such observation can (in)directly pledge alliance with the existing power structure to reinforce the class agenda. *Pride and Prejudice* dramatizes this gap by posing the question to the reader: Is Darcy's prideful judgement for the defense of knowledge or class privileges? Kenneth Moler straightforwardly puts down Darcy's problem to class pride. He points out that Darcy belongs to the noble de Bough family, possesses the Pemberley estate, and has an income of £10000 per annum, enough to have a marriage with a special license. As Charlotte Lucas says, he certainly has a right to make whatever judgement he likes, he has 'a *right* to be proud' (20 emphasis original). But I believe that while Darcy belongs to the privileged class, Austen does not intend to equate Darcy with snobbish aristocrats. Darcy (not Colonel FitzWilliam) remains the only person in the novel who can feel ashamed of his aunt's (Lady Catherine) ill breeding. In fact, Darcy's language represents the intrinsic, unconscious alliance of the master discourse with (discursive, social, class) power. It manifests a fullness, a judicial authority that can mix with but may not completely overlap with class complacency. Armed with words like 'Truth', 'Principles', 'Justice', the master can de-ideologize his stance through a legitimate, 'objective' perspective, and can safely reject people 'by reason, by reflection' (192). In a similar vein, Darcy comes to see that, after a judicial, 'correct' observation, the Other is utterly unworthy of his attention because of its excessive frivolity. And this rejection of the Other is embedded within a class-oriented discourse of 'taste' or 'worthy pursuits'. Plebian, carnivalesque pleasures

are always distasteful for they have an inclination towards transgression of (class) order or solemnity. However, the love of Truth also allows the master to further de-ideologize its position. Darcy turns out to be a non-conformer who critiques the servile obedience of order. He is 'disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking of [his] approbation'. He 'thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted [him]' (380).

In the story, Austen dramatizes the way in which the master can experience a second gap within the master discourse—for Darcy represents a prideful subject who feels unhappy to be excluded by all. This feeling shows a different, dependent unconscious that acts against his conscious 'independent fullness'. He 'walks here and he walks there', with an intention to show his contempt of people's lowly enjoyment of life. However, Austen notes that the proudest character can also feel a lack rising inside him—a lack that cannot be mollified by judgement (Darcy has a 'silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation' 25). To repress this lack, Darcy resorts to a fantasmal 'judicial fullness': to judge people in an even more merciless manner.

This little episode certainly illustrates why Lacan considers the master discourse to be without fantasy, and Žižek turns it around to argue that its non-fantasmal dimension actually expresses its fantasmal facet. The master aims at making some absolute, universally correct, non-fantasmal judgement to deny the possibility of its lack (Lacan); however, this attempt can only trap the master into creating a world that attributes an illusory (fantasmal) fullness to itself, and an arbitrary reading to receive/reject the others (Žižek). In the novel, Darcy becomes more and more severe in his critique of people. Citing the excuse of 'unacquaintedness', Darcy actually implies that—by his 'objective' standard—no one is worthy of his attention, no lady is handsome enough to be his partner. To Mr Collins and Mrs Bennet, he either 'turn[s] silently away' (43), or his facial expression changes 'gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity' (100). Many critics believe that Darcy's judgement is often accurate; however, Austen intends her readers to see that the master's arbitrary 'correct' standard can err (as Darcy later admits the loveliness of Lizzy). And Darcy can be tyrannical and cruel. Mr Bennet jokingly says that Darcy 'never looks at any woman but to see a blemish' (363). Darcy's

‘objective’ remark on Lizzy (‘She is tolerable’ 12) not only unveils the master’s harsh (fantasmal) aesthetic standard, but also reveals an arbitrary imposition of his own standard on people. It manifests a fundamental lack of respect towards others: a person can only look ‘tolerable’ in his eyes.

Austen leads us to admire the pursuit of impartial, objective Truth (S_1 , which characterizes the enlightenment ideal); but she also makes us realize the dangers of this ideal. In the novel, Darcy remains true to his words and is not much deluded by class prestige to flatter Miss de Bourgh or Miss Bingley. Readers are drawn to admire Darcy’s impartiality: ‘I will venture to say that my investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears’ (197). However, Austen implies that such ‘objectivity’ can be changeable, and can be frighteningly judgmental. With the use of an indirect discourse, Austen informs us that a man can first look at a woman (Lizzy) only to ‘criticize’, and soon tell ‘himself and his friends that she has hardly a good feature in her face’ (23). The ‘impartial’ Truth-seeker does not know that his perspective is structured/distorted by the invisible link, the spectacles of class, moods or circumstantial comparison. Darcy judges Lizzy in a negative light because he considers Meryton ‘a less polished society’ (25), and is ‘in no humor to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men’ (12). On another occasion when Lizzy is not slighted by men, he soon finds her face ‘uncommonly intelligent’. However, Darcy is *not* prepared to forgo his standard. Hence readers find Darcy to be an extraordinarily ‘reluctant’ lover who can love and fault the Other at the same time. And the love of ‘Truth’ can trap him in an ambivalent position of admiring and denigrating Lizzy.

One major problem with the master is that he believes he can be autonomous and all-seeing. With a love of observing others and self-surveillance, the master believes that he does not need the Other and can make reliable judgement on people and himself. Austen overthrows this fantasmal autonomy by highlighting the way in which self-knowledge comes only with the mediation of the Other. The simple fact is that the subject can never see itself by occupying the space from which the Other observes him. In the story, Darcy has a remarkably honest and sophisticated understanding of himself and people: he has ‘no pretension’ to say that he is faultless. ‘My temper I dare not vouch for.—It is I believe too little yielding—

certainly too little for the convenience for the world'. He acknowledges himself to have a 'resentful' disposition (58). He knows he is not an endearing figure. He is an earnest defender of his sister, a good master to Mrs Reynolds, a good landlord to his hometown. And Darcy knows that his way represents the tyrannical, benevolent master's position: he improves the situations of the Other, but the Other is to be put in an inferior position, to remain marginalized, and silenced, enslaved by him. He follows the family tradition of never visiting a small market-town, though he has liberally done 'much good among the poor' (265). Austen challenges the master's (pseudo) panoptic self-analysis. The master thinks he sees his fault, and is satisfied either with the seeing, or even with the fault (e.g. Darcy's defense of pride). To use Gary Handwerk's words, Austen's way of dealing with Darcy shows that she rejects the master's 'satisfaction with an abstract term, with the mere act of naming [his demerits], then [the master] disposes of the issue'.²⁰ Austen foregrounds the fact that 'self-revelation is deceptive, already bound up in a system of values that justify whatever is revealed'. As a result, only 'when that self-revelation is articulated back to the subject and thus defined in a more precise way does it become effective self-knowledge' (ibid).

Austen suggests that the self can only be seen through the Other. Though the subject may predict the Other's speech, the Other's simple act of repeating, or sending back the image to the subject—with an inevitable change of stress, or a slightly shifted emphasis, or in an outrageously shocking, inverted form—can always be an alienating, unexpected, traumatic experience. It destroys the hegemonic superiority in the subject's self-representation. This shock will eventually prompt the subject to explore the multiple meanings of the Other's message, and dethrone the subject's security. In the story, Darcy's change represents the fall of a self-sufficient judicial pride. He gallantly falls in love, only to be chided by Lizzy, and is forced to confront his lack of respect towards the Other under the master-signifiers of 'correctness' or 'benevolence'. The life and death struggle takes the form of the master's proud defense of reason versus the lady's inversion of his 'sense' and her demand for a genuine respect towards people. Darcy's justification of his pride—knowledge, truth, and justice—is rejected by Lizzy as inadequate if a person does not

²⁰ Handwerk, 105.

treat others with politeness and respect. Darcy may (mis)recognize himself as a 'liberal', 'sweetest-tempered', 'good-natured', 'most generous-hearted' master as described by his governess Mrs Reynolds, but Lizzy shows he has nothing but a 'selfish disdain of the feelings of the others' (193). Darcy is genuinely shocked, and he later links his pride to his paternal education in Pemberley:

As a child, I was taught what was right...I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son (for many years an only *child*), I was spoilt by my parents who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing—to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty'. (369)

Austen does not disapprove of the governing class's quest for 'what is right', but she laughs at its 'judicial rightness'. The idea of 'rightness' is ultimately for the assertion of narcissistic unity (to mirror itself as a 'benevolent and amiable' subject), the denial of the Other (to 'care for none beyond my own family circle'), and the defense of good feelings ('to wish to think meanly' of others). In other words, it is not a love of the absolute 'Good', but a love of imaginary rightness ('I am good'). In that regard, pride does not, as Mary Bennet says, '[relate] more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us' (20). Pride is a relational product mediated through the Other, in particular, through a necessary dependence on, comparison with, and negation of the neighbor to heighten the (illusory) 'goodness' of the ego.

Austen coincides with Lacan in seeing that the construction of a new subject-position is the genuine way towards change. This new position has a negotiary dimension in which the subject is led by another person to reflect upon its 'self', but the subject remains the final interpreter of its new subjectivity. Lizzy's words violently destroy Darcy's self-image, and mirror his failure to be a gentleman, as a gentleman calls for an egalitarian politeness and respect towards other people (but one must note that this politeness does not necessary imply political egalitarianism, as Mr. Knightley so well demonstrates in *Emma*). As a result, Darcy suffers a crisis of identity because these words 'have tortured' him, have given him 'inexpressible pain' for many months—'though it was some time...before [he] was reasonable

enough to allow their justice' (367-8). Unlike an illusory self-diagnosed surveillance (which upholds a 'detached' but actually I-oriented perspective), the pain of the Other is vividly thrown back to the seer. Darcy understands that his 'behavior to [Lizzy] at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable' (367). Enlightened by love, Darcy tries to think from the Other's viewpoint to understand that he has 'been a selfish being in all [his] life, in practice, though not principle' (369). He now knows 'how insufficient were all [his] pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased' (369).

Austen arranges for the consequence of this life and death struggle to be a step towards the 'recognition and intersubjective legitimation' of each other's identity.²¹ The new subject-position adopts a consciousness 'which is not purely for itself, but for an other' (ibid). In the novel, the change in Darcy is mirrored in his new behavior in Pemberley. Jane Nardin says Darcy 'is determined to show [Lizzy] that, his manners now exhibit true consideration for others, as well as merely formal politeness'.²² I believe it is a change that goes deeper than manners, and ends in a new recognition. The recognition of *the Other as a true Other*, not a thing or a slave to be judged, is shown in the changing speech of Darcy. When he expresses the wish to invite Lizzy to meet his sister, his language shows an unprecedented effort to recognize the 'you' in 'me': 'Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?' (277). Even though Darcy still retains his cognitive 'autonomy', the new speaking position foregrounds the desire to respect and talk to the Other as an Other, not as an already 'judged' creature.

In the story, Austen keeps approving of and challenging Darcy's (illusory) 'objective' observation. We are led to admire Darcy's motto (he makes his judgment using impersonal observation); however, his argument actually betrays his unconscious relatedness to the Other's remarks. Darcy claims that he learns of Jane's love for Bingley 'from [his] own observation' (371) instead of from Lizzy's information last spring. However, in his two short visits to the Bennet family after their long departure from Netherfield, Jane is 'anxious that no difference should be

²¹ Williams, *Recognition*, 174.

²² Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums* 60.

perceived...and she [does] not know she [is] always silent'. And during the second visit, Jane is still determined to be indifferent to Bingley ('Why should you wish me to persuade me to feel more than I acknowledge?' 343). It is only after the third meeting (and Darcy has *already* left for London) that Jane 'said no more of her indifference' (345). In Jane's early friendship with Bingley, Jane hides nothing in expressing her love for Bingley; but Darcy—by observation—said in his letter that he thinks she is 'without any symptom of peculiar regard' for Bingley (197); and yet, while Jane says she is determined to be reserved, Darcy claims that he has 'narrowly observed' her and discovers she is in love with Bingley. Though Darcy adopts Lizzy's opinion, he has to filter it through his so-called 'impartial' system.

Meanwhile, most critics argue that Elizabeth Bennet is an autonomous lady. Susan Morgan says that 'Elizabeth's freedom is basically the freedom to think for herself'. But she believes that Elizabeth's 'intelligence' is dangerous because 'her superior wit actually has little to do with truth'.²³ LeRoy Smith suggests that Austen, by making Elizabeth Bennet an erring heroine, has concentrated 'on the threat of selfhood' in 'the marriage-making process'.²⁴ However, in the novel, we actually discover that Elizabeth's errors do not come from her selfhood or her intelligence, but from her sympathy, her moral identification with victims—Jane and Wickham. Claudia Johnson has rightly pointed out that Elizabeth's lack of sufficient data has been the major cause of her misjudgment towards Wickham. But more importantly, Austen's story tells us that Lizzy's 'moral pride' in identifying with the underdog has led her to side with the 'victims' such as Jane and Wickham at once. She 'found the interest of the subject increase, and listened with all her heart' to Wickham's story (78). In fact, Lizzy's stance represents a dominant strand in British moral philosophy in the eighteenth-century.

In 'The Art of Sympathy in Eighteenth-Century British Moral Thought', John B.Radner traces David Hume and Adam Smith's influence on the theorizing of sympathy. Hume first suggests that a person has to visualize what another person is feeling, which depends on the subject's reading of another person's external signs (the presence of tears, pain etc). Secondly, in the *Treatise* (Book II, section ix),

²³ Morgan, *In the Meantime*, 78, 99.

²⁴ LeRoy Smith, *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman* 87.

Hume suggests that, as a person cannot understand the actual feelings of the Other, 'a powerful and deliberately active imagination is the basis for full sympathy and hence the foundation of general benevolence'.²⁵ In 'tendency' and 'direction', sympathy resembles benevolence, which for Hume is 'an original pleasure arising from the pleasure of the person belov'd, and a pain proceeding from his pain'.²⁶ Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* further points out the value of 'imaginative projection' as he reiterates the Humean view: the subject cannot understand what the others are actually experiencing. But he puts a stronger emphasis on individual responsibility and effort to empathize with the Other: A person 'must, first of all, endeavor as much as he can to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer'.²⁷

In this particular sense, a moral imagination and reason are but different means to strive towards the same goal; and Lizzy and Darcy are not as different as the critics presume. Lizzy's active moral imagination is the equivalent of Darcy's 'benevolence'—for both are related to altruistic actions. A sympathetic, moral imagination leads a subject to go beyond selfishness, to empathize and love the Other, to feel the misery of a fellow human being—though it puts a misplaced faith in the subject's capability to have a full grip of reality, or presumes the sufferer is unquestioningly worthy of sympathy. In the story, Lizzy first comes to side with Wickham upon seeing the first sign of pain on his face. As Hume suggests that one cannot see through what the others are actually feeling, Lizzy's sympathy towards Wickham typifies a moral response in perceiving the pain of the Other: it involves the use of 'a powerful and deliberately active imagination' which is 'the foundation of general benevolence'.²⁸ After listening to Wickham's story, Lizzy believes that the victim must deserve sympathy: 'there was truth in his looks' (86). Her goodwill towards Wickham is subsequently deepened by his preference of her. Likewise, Lizzy is totally on the side of the suffering Jane. She dislikes the weak-minded Bingley and the interfering Darcy. She wishes Bingley ill: he should marry another

²⁵ Radner "The Art of Sympathy in Eighteenth-Century British Moral Thought" *Studies in 18th Culture* 7 (1979), 197.

²⁶ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 385.

²⁷ Adam Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 21.

girl only to regret the loss of Jane. The moment she learns of Darcy's part in separating Bingley from Jane, she re-reads Jane's letters: the 'letters contain no actual complaint', or 'any communication of present suffering'; however, the work of a moral imagination leads her to see that 'almost in all every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterize her style' (188). Lizzy believes that she has a sympathetic knowledge of reality: 'Elizabeth noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal. Mr Darcy's shameful boast of what misery he had been able to inflict, gave her a keener sense of her sister's suffering' (ibid).

Austen points out the danger of Smith's idea of moral sentiments—how the subject must 'endeavor as much as he can to put himself in the situation of the other', and 'to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer'.²⁹ In the subject's unquestioning identification with the sufferer, the subject can easily err. Austen's story implies that, as the subject cherishes a moral, preconceived stance to side with the victim, and is determined to fight the oppressors through a 'justified' moral imagination, this subject is not likely to investigate the true cause of the victim's suffering. It would look like a hurtful attempt to add impartiality to injuries, or reveal to the distressed person that s/he has actually done something to 'deserve' its present traumatic state of being. Hence Lizzy is reflective enough to know the claims of Darcy and Bingley, but is not even tempted to reflect on the cause of the problem, the not-so-encouraging behavior of Jane, or Wickham's version of his story. In the case of Jane, Lizzy's immediate response is that 'her heart was divided between concern for her sister, and resentment against all the others' (133). With an unselfish love of the victim and a will to resist the 'oppressors', Lizzy is analytically alert to notice the 'abominable pride' of Mr Darcy, and hates Bingley for 'that easiness of temper' and that 'want of resolution which now made him the slave of his designing friends'. 'She could think of nothing else' (134).

²⁸ Radner, "The Art of Sympathy in Eighteenth-Century British Moral Thought" 197.

²⁹ Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* 21.

Some critics adopt the view that Lizzy favors wit and has little regard for truth.³⁰ Darcy calls this a willful misunderstanding (58); but it actually reveals the intrinsic problem of sympathy. In his essay, Radner foregrounds one major objection to sympathy: sympathy is not the same as reason. It can be ‘whimsical, partisan, irrational, and likely to mislead’ (191). (Sympathy can only become truly worthy when it leads to ‘virtuous action’, and is ‘controlled and augmented by reason’, *ibid*). If not biased by her identification with victims, the story tells us that Lizzy’s ‘quickness of observation’ can lead her to discern the truth without any problem. Miss Bingley is ‘proud and conceited’ (15), Mr Collins is ‘pompous’ and ‘insensible’ (108), Lady Catherine is ‘self important’ and ‘authoritative’ (162), her mother is vulgar, her father is a bad husband (236), and her sisters (Kitty and Lydia) are ‘vain, idle, ignorant, and absolutely uncontrolled’ (231). And Lizzy’s judgement (Darcy has a propensity to ‘hate everybody’ 58) is later admitted to be true by Darcy himself. Lizzy does not have any preconceived hatred of the wealthy subjects prior to her empirical knowledge of Lady Catherine. And Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine are *observed* to be snobs.

Pride and Prejudice provides us with a model of misrecognition, a narrative diagnosis of the ways in which the subject can go astray with the fallibility of moral pride and its sympathetic imagination. However, it is also this moral, benevolent (mis)recognition, one that leads the subject to take sides with the sufferer, and resist injustice, that has enabled Lizzy to become one of the most ‘delightful’ subjects that has ‘ever appeared in print’ (as Austen herself so well describes Elizabeth Bennet in a letter she wrote to Cassandra³¹). Her resistance towards Darcy marks the problem of the sympathetic bias—a partisan support of the sufferers; but it also represents the way an oppressed person can fight back by refusing to become a slave, by speaking an irreverent discourse, by becoming uncivil and impertinent. Lizzy’s position reveals that sympathy may not be founded on good discernment (after all, Darcy did not victimize Wickham); however, her impertinent language also shows that a bad

³⁰ For example, Susan Morgan says ‘Elizabeth’s failure is one of intelligence’ (*In the Meantime* 81). ‘[I]n the midst of Elizabeth’s lively banter and her quick successes in teasing Jane, there emerges the disturbing fact that her superior wit actually has little to do with truth’. (99). And Howard Babb notes that ‘warm feeling rather than cool sense informs many of [Elizabeth’s] decisions, and not only those concerning Darcy’ (*Jane Austen’s Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* 119).

beginning does not necessarily produce bad results—as ‘one cannot be always laughing at a man without now and then stumbling on something witty’ (226). In fact, this impertinence signifies the possibility of power-reversal in which the powerless can (justly or unjustly) question the grandeur of the privileged class by subverting their authority. Lizzy’s refusal to answer Lady Catherine’s question of her age represents a ‘justified’ struggle on the side of the less privileged class against the domineering aristocrats; but in Darcy’s situation, even an unjustified accusation helps accidentally to push a man to reflect on the value of the Other.

This irreverent, impertinent discourse stands out in a competitive society where everybody speaks a unanimous language to please the rich. By contrasting Mr Collins and Charlotte’s mercenary decisions with Elizabeth’s refusal to marry Darcy, or her rebellious non-reply to Lady Catherine, Austen intends her readers to see that a lady’s intrepidity (though backed by a misplaced sympathy) to fight at the expense of her well-being should deserve our respect. However, Austen does not characterize her heroine as a recalcitrant lady indifferent to the distress of the rich subject. Lizzy can sympathize with Darcy’s struggle in his offer of marriage, and feel how hard it is for him to overcome his psychological and class barriers as he proposes to her; but she is not tempted to accept what she regards as an oppressor’s hand at that time. Lizzy does not, as Walter Scott teasingly comments, love Darcy because she sees Pemberley. While her resistance towards Darcy softens in the face of the grand house and the favorable ‘family prejudice’ of Mrs Reynolds towards Darcy (270), Lizzy’s moral stance to side with the less fortunate remains intact. She still values her aunt and uncle more than being a wealthy mistress. ‘Recollecting herself’, Lizzy silently notices her marriage with Darcy would mean ‘my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me: I should not have been allowed to invite them.’ ‘This was a lucky recollection—it saved her from something like regret’ (246). Once again, Austen has dramatized how a moral lady’s sympathetic identification with the poor has triumphed over the love of prestige or wealth. Austen highlights the fact that Lizzy falls in love with Darcy because Darcy is re-cognized to be a victim in the treacherous plan of Wickham, or an accurate observer of Jane’s behavior. Most

³¹ Letter to Cassandra Austen, Chawton, Feb. [1813]; *Jane Austen’s Letters II*, ed. R.W.Chapman, pp.297.

important of all, he takes the initiative to befriend the less privileged Gardiners. 'Elizabeth could not but be pleased, could not but triumph' (255).

In the story, the life and death struggle between the two proud masters culminates in the proposal scene. In the face of Elizabeth's charges, Darcy fails to hold on to his autonomy, 'his complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind is visible in every feature' (190). Elizabeth feels she has lost an important marital offer. She feels 'the tumult of her mind...painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour' (193). Austen echoes Hegel in her belief in the power of love. Only love can motivate a proud man to value the Other—even though Darcy says he begins the entire process unwillingly and unconsciously ('I was in the middle before I knew that I *had* begun' 380). And love breeds compassion: Darcy's 'virtuous action' to help Lydia is not motivated by a calculated gain of Lizzy's hand, but by a compassionate 'wish of giving happiness to [Lizzy]' (366). In turn, it leads to the awakening of love and gratitude on the part of Elizabeth. Love, as Hegel says, ends in 'mutual recognition'. Lizzy understands that she can redeem Darcy with her 'liveliness', and Darcy can restrain her imagination by his 'superior understanding'.

However, *Pride and Prejudice* does not share Hegel's vision of total renewal in human relationships. When it comes to the world, readers can see that Austen is extremely skeptical about the chance of total reconciliation with the Other. In the novel, the ignorant Mrs Bennet and the snobbish Lady Catherine have as much pride and prejudice as Darcy and Elizabeth. And their refusal to accept or tolerate the Other shows no sign of change in the end: Mrs Bennet cannot tolerate the Other's happiness, so much so that the neighbor's joy can drive her to live in a state 'beyond the reach of reason' (62). For Lady Catherine, she can only be kind towards the Other as long as the Other is within her control and is inferior to her.

In most readings of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet is always presented as an object of derision, the prototype of incompetence in controlling herself and her daughters. In recent years, some critics change sides and defend Mrs Bennet's poor nerves in relation to marital frustration and her financial predicament. Mrs Bennet now becomes the victim of the patriarchal culture, her nerves are read as a 'metaphor

of powerlessness'.³² While it is true that Mrs Bennet represents a woman of inferior understanding and a victim of the inheritance system, Austen has pushed her readers to realize that a foolish victim can also be an aggressive character in her *persecution* of the Other. I am going to argue that this is actually the true, *darker* origin of her 'poor nerves'—a kind of self-persecution that originates from an anger at the possibility of lack, and an aggressive intolerance to the Other's (imaginary) joy. It denotes the presence of pride (she 'must' possess unity or be the first), but this love of fullness also manifests itself in an aggressive, prejudicial dislike of the Other's enjoyment. Lacan describes the situation in this way: the moment the subject sees the Other's *jouissance*, it will feel the rise of an 'unfathomable aggressivity' (S7 186) because it cannot handle the neighbor's 'malignant *jouissance*' properly (S7 198). Mrs Bennet represents the extimate relational subject who needs the Other for 'news' and 'visits' (5), but she has to compete with and hate the Other in order to seek the unattainable *jouissance*. In the story, Mrs Bennet's relationality with the Other does not lead to any regard for the neighbor—though she cannot live without them and often dines with them. As soon as she knows that the Lucases are to visit Mr Bingley while Mr Bennet says he is not, she immediately suffers from an attack of nerves.

[U]nable to contain herself, [Mrs Bennet] began scolding one of her daughters.

'Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces.' (6)

As Bingley is considered to be 'the rightful property' of the Bennet family, the mere thought of the neighbor's having the advantage of knowing him can upset Mrs Bennet. Miller and Žižek have both elaborated on this aspect of the self-Other relationship. The Other's enjoyment is seen as a 'theft of the subject's enjoyment' (TN 203)—because the self wants to possess unity (or *jouissance*) so much that the Other's joy looks like a 'theft' to induce loss to the self. Thus Mrs Bennet, in her unhappiness, *imagines* that someone is stealing her happiness or her composure—

³² John Wiltshire's comment on Mrs Bennet has epitomized many critics' view on this character. 'Dramatically, Mrs Bennet's nervousness is seen to be the correlate of her anxiety over her five unmarried daughters...Her nerves...thus function in two ways—as real distress, the result of anger, humiliation and powerlessness—and as modes of recuperation—an attempt to rescue herself as a center of attention, if not of actual authority. Illness becomes a vehicle whereby the ego-gratification that her youth and spirits once brought her can be salvaged as the consideration now due to the injured parent' (*Jane Austen and the Body* 20).

either in the form of Lady Lucas's treachery or Kitty's happy unconcern (for Kitty seems to cough happily and cares only for herself). The failure to handle lack is displaced in the symptoms of 'poor nerves'.

Austen produces a subject who often speaks the 'victim discourse', but actually, Mrs Bennet's language re-produces the speech of an aggressor—in its violent imposition on the Other. She makes others do what she commands, and loves to take away people's happiness. Mrs Bennet's words aim at forcing her neighbors to admit her superiority and their defeat: she compliments Charlotte with 'civil self-command' ('*You began the evening well,*' '*You were Mr Bingley's first choice.*' 18)—only to make Charlotte repeat Mr Robertson's story, i.e. Bingley prefers no one else but Jane. The aggressive theft of the Other's happiness happens again when Mrs Bennet talks to Lady Lucas,

[Mrs Bennet] was talking to that [Lady Lucas] freely, openly, and of nothing else but of her expectation that Jane would be soon married to Mr Bingley....*She concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.* (99 emphasis added)

This indirect discourse from Mrs Bennet's perspective sensitizes readers to note the fight for *jouissance* between the self and the Other. The aggressive subject says many well-wishing words, only to honestly rejoice at the ill-success of the Other ('there is no chance of it'). Lady Lucas escapes to the consolation of 'cold ham and chicken' in an attempt to fill up her lack. Austen's story also shows that the theft of the Other's enjoyment is a universal phenomenon. After Charlotte has promised to marry Collins, Lady Lucas's lack is replaced by an overflow of joy. And her 'love of the Other' suddenly increases in inverse proportion to the feelings of Mrs Bennet.

Lady Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mrs Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well married; and she called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to say how happy she was, though Mrs Bennet's sour looks and ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness away. (127)

From a fight for *jouissance*, things quickly develop into a sour intolerance of the Other's joy. The moment Mrs Bennet knows that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married, she is reduced to a state of bitter anger. Mrs Bennet's victim discourse represents the neighbor's success as won at 'her' expense, or as 'stolen' from her.

Charlotte steals away 'Lizzy's' Mr. Collins. And Mr Collins steals 'her' Longbourn estate from the family. She 'trusted that [the Collinses] would never be happy together' (127). Mrs Bennet complains bitterly to her sister for she feels robbed by her neighbor,

The consequence of it is, that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married before I have, and that Longbourn estate is just as much as entailed as ever. The Lucases are very artful people indeed, sister. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbors who think of themselves before anybody else. (140)

The neighbors are now 'odious', 'artful' people. And Mrs Bennet's poor nerves are featured as a direct consequence of her (self-directed) aggressive attack.

Mrs Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of any thing concerning the match threw her into an agony of ill humor, and wherever she went she was sure of hearing it talked of. The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her....She complained bitterly of all this to her husband. (129-30)

Austen's free indirect discourse penetrates into the perspective of a nervous housewife, and allows readers to understand, critique and reinterpret the nature of Mrs Bennet's maternal agony. Victimized by the patriarchal practice (entail), Mrs Bennet has every reason to worry about her future. However, the imaginary conversation ('she was sure of hearing') can only mirror how intense and aggressive is her obsession with the neighbors, and her anger at her loss. By fantasizing the Other's spite, Mrs Bennet represents an aggressive (self-persecutory) subject who 'suffers in her own flesh the structure of language that tears her body up by mortifying it, and she makes herself, finally, the promoter of the subjective division'.³³ In other words, while the paternal language—the Law—alienates a person from a state of well-being and decrees that a woman be oppressed, the imaginary (spiteful) words that she herself re-produces in her mind serve to further oppress her body by promoting a new level of alienation. It speaks a dual-voiced language that, on the one hand, makes the subject see its present lack (the whisper of her failure); on the other hand, it immediately provokes the subject's strong, angry

³³ Alicia Arenas *et al.* "The Other in Hysteria and Obsession" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher and Alcorn, 148.

refusal of inadequacy (she hates the very mentioning of the match). As a result, Mrs Bennet's suffering represents a body torn between an acknowledgement and resentment of lack. 'Nothing could console and nothing could appease' Mrs Bennet. She feels 'she herself had been barbarously used by them all' (127), her mind can only feel 'an agony of ill humor'.

Given the subject's intolerance of the Other's enjoyment, *Pride and Prejudice* tells us that, to avoid conflicts, a harmonious relationship tends to be well-defined in advance and conditional, i.e. the subject always knows whether it is in a superior or inferior speaking position. Lady Catherine de Bourgh's social relations reflect this dimension of the human psyche: friendliness is defined on the condition that the others are inferior to her, and she can have an exclusive advantage over them. Douglas Murray has summarized Lady Catherine's love of panoptic control over her neighbor,

In a novel full of powerful information centers, the most knowledgeable and potentially the most powerful is Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whom I label the 'panoptic center' of the novel. She gathers information first by noticing—in fact, the word 'notice' is often used to accompany her appearances—second, by asking questions—the interrogative is her favored form of the sentence—and, last, through the use of the Rev. Williams Collins, whose career suggests the upper class's use of the lower orders as spies and manipulators. Her center of intelligence is Rosings, which appropriately features numerous windows expensively glazed.³⁴

Austen particularly foregrounds the way in which the privileged subject's 'rights' of interrogating others on personal, domestic issues (with no reciprocal exchange expected) can help define and sustain the unequal power hierarchy in the society. Through the notion of discursive deference, the privileged subject can derogate the Other, and effectively control the neighbors through procedures of division, cross-examination and rejection. In the story, Lady Catherine does not appear till Lizzy reaches Rosings, and the narrative mode in introducing her is mainly mediated through Elizabeth's perspectives. With a focalized perspective filtered through Elizabeth's middle class vision, readers are led at once to disidentify with this great Lady. Lady Catherine does not 'make her visitors forget their inferior rank'. As Lady

³⁴ Douglas Murray, "Gazing and Avoiding the Gaze" in *Jane Austen's Business* ed. Juliet McMaster, 45.

Catherine keeps asking questions, Mary's answer (how to pack her trunk) is first reduced into an insignificant small voice, then negated as an incorrect reply. She must repack her trunk. By contrasting Elizabeth's singular resistance against a master-slave hierarchy (she wonders how 'Lady Catherine could bear' Mr Collins' slavish flattery), Austen intends her readers to take note of the tyranny of Lady Catherine, as well as all other subjects' *voluntary* participation in a pre-defined power relationship, which forms the basis of her smooth governance of Rosings. Sir Williams is 'completely awed' (162), Mary and Charlotte are cooperative, and Mr Collins simply goes out of his way to please Lady Catherine. Lizzy is the only one who 'has ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence' (166).

Austen also contrasts the two types of judgement in her story. Darcy makes his judgement according to a quasi-objective observation. While the empirical method is not ideology-free, it allows him to fault his friend (Mr Bingley's cursory writing style), his admirers (Miss Bingley, Mr Collin), his enemies (Wickham) and his superiors (Lady Catherine). Eventually, he breaks new ground in admiring Lizzy's 'improper' visit to the sick Jane, and becomes fond of a merchant—Mr Gardiner—because he has 'intelligence', 'taste' and 'good manners' (255). However, Lady Catherine's judgement is strictly defined in terms of class. Her way of reading the Other represents a snobbish insistence on class differences—the lesser gentry class can do nothing properly, while the aristocratic class can always attend to every detail according to the rules of propriety. Georgiana always travels 'with two men servants' (212), so the middle-class way of travelling post by themselves is 'highly improper'. While Lady Catherine does not pick on the way of Darcy, Lizzy notices that, during Lady Catherine's 'neighborly' visits to the Collinses,

She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture, or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if she accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mrs Collins's joints of meat were too large for her family.
(169)

What draws our attention is that the abundance of the Other (e.g. Mr Collin's meat) is deliberately (mis)recognized as a 'lack' (in this case, a lack of sense in home management). To heighten the present hierarchy, the Other's fullness is strategically redefined as an evidence of 'lack'. In the story, Lady Catherine has a special way of

seeing a lack of method in Mr Bennet's education to his daughters, a lack of skills in Charlotte's running of the household, a lack of practice in Elizabeth's piano performance, a lack of order in Maria's method of packing, and a lack of comfort and space in the Longbourn estate ('you have a very small park here', 'the windows are full west' 352).

Pride and Prejudice makes us realize that the privileged subject, to avoid conflicts, often comes to appease the Other through a conditional 'love'. In Lacanian terms, this love marks a false altruism to maintain the subject's preponderance over the Other. And the subject loves to be 'useful' in order to maintain the power hierarchy and status quo. Lacan describes it in this way,

My egoism is quite content with a certain altruism, altruism of the kind that is situated on the level of the useful....It is a fact of experience that what I want is the good of others in the image of my own. That doesn't cost so much. What I want is the good of others provided that it remain in the image of my own. I would even say that the whole thing deteriorates so rapidly that it becomes: provided that *it depends on my efforts*' (S7 187 emphasis added).

Austen's narrative certainly forces her readers to notice how the aristocratic lady's idea of 'altruism' 'is the good of others in the image of my own'. And this conditional love towards the poor contributes to the politics of social harmony in Rosings. Lady Catherine represents the active ruling subject who is singularly devoted to being 'useful' and 'egalitarian' in her visits to all (while Darcy refused to be used by anybody). The visit 'doesn't cost so much', and no financial aid is mentioned in the novel to the poor (to be contrasted with Darcy's generous alms-giving). But in terms of effect, her presence or intervention marks the ruling class's effort to update and uphold their panoptic governance or distribution of resources to the Other. In the domestic scene, Lady Catherine loves to 'do good' provided that it is settled on her terms, and depends on her efforts. She encourages the less privileged class to accumulate more cultural capital—as symbolized by the remark that Lizzy should practice more. However, the poor lady is singularly barred from using the piano-forte in the drawing room, and is deliberately invited to play in the governess's room. In other words, this altruism is effective in heightening class barriers, or enhancing the power to impose and to inculcate a division, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit. In the social scene, Lady

Catherine is 'a most active magistrate in her own parish' (169). She often 'saillied forth into the village to settle [her people's] difference, silence their complaints and scold them into 'harmony and plenty' (169).

Austen's narrative is once again mediated through Lizzy's perspective, but the un-said text pushes us to realize that the ruling class's love of peace, or their subsequent altruistic intervention, is essentially a means to maintain hierarchical power relations, and to safeguard their economic or ideological interests. While intervention can give personal satisfaction (Lady Catherine 'loves to be of use' 381), it can forward class stability and prolong the interested party's reign. In that regard, readers can notice that the subject's usefulness and egalitarian recognition of the Other are essentially different from genuine altruism. People in Rosings are recognized, marginalized, and hassled at the same time, probably with a meager supply of benefits. As seen from Lady Catherine's attitude to the Collinses, the ruling class does not desire equality or improvement. Altruistic aid is but for the maintenance of social differences and the smooth functioning of class society (scold the poor people into 'harmony' and 'plenty').

Austen unmasks how this pseudo-altruism cannot withstand the test of class transgression. Any sign of upsetting the existing class order will bring forth instant revenge, and reveal the governing class's intolerance of the Other's (possible) enjoyment of wealth. Austen uses a fierce verbal contest to mirror how violent a class combat can be. As the mask of 'kindness' falls off, the matriarch is unveiled as a snob. Cross-class marriages are not to be endured. Lady Catherine's love of the status quo takes transgression as 'class treason'. Interestingly, Austen's story draws us to critique the irrational nature of the privileged subject's argument, while she also defends the idea of class marriage. Austen ridicules class logic as Lady Catherine argues that cross-class marriage means a violation of moral values (Lizzy is 'unfeeling, selfish', ungrateful), a forfeiture of rational sentiments ('reason', 'propriety, delicacy'), and the overturn of the contractual marital custom (the 'tacit' 'engagement between [Darcy and Anne] is of a particular kind' 364). Lady Catherine imagines that such a marriage is inviting self-destruction for the poor lady, and 'self-interest' should forbid Lizzy from associating herself with Darcy—for she 'will be censured, slighted, despised, by every one connected with him', and her 'name will

never even be mentioned by any of them (355). Eventually, Lady Catherine adds insult and injury into her argument: a lady, ‘without family, connections or fortune’, is debased to be an ‘upstart’ creature. Old injuries (e.g. Lydia’s elopement) are deliberately mentioned for hurtful effect. In this verbal conflict, Austen is unquestioningly on the side of Lizzy—which represents the defense of class mobility and the resistant spirit. If a man chooses to love a poor woman, no relative has the right to interfere; and the world ‘would have too much sense to join in the scorn’ (358). However, we can notice that *Pride and Prejudice* does not abandon the notion of class marriage. Austen is notably conservative in her attitude toward making an ‘imprudent’ liaison. For example, Lydia suffers a lot from her imprudent marriage to Wickham. And Miss Frances, in *Mansfield Park*, is ruined by her choice of a lieutenant without ‘education, family, connection’. But *Pride and Prejudice* supplements *Northanger Abbey* in defining Austen’s broadened view on marriage. Catherine Morland liberally believes that if one side of the family has fortune, the marriage can be justified. Elizabeth claims that, as, in terms of class status, Darcy and herself are both ‘gentlemen’s’ descendents, unequal financial situation does not count. So far they are ‘equal’ in terms of blood. Juliet McMaster accurately highlights how the landed gentry class seems to draw a dividing line for Austen’s notion of class marriage. Austen is liberal when it comes to marriage above the landed gentry class, but she is conservative enough to not let her subjects marry down. In Juliet McMaster’s words, ‘Austen seems to approve of this relative flattening of the degrees of distinction above the country gentry. But she notes too, with irony, the tendency to be acutely aware of the degrees of distinction in the scale below’.³⁵

* * *

Austen always tries to reconcile people so as to perfect the happy ending. In *Pride and Prejudice*, she quickly puts back her subjects in the society to reinforce the ideological fantasy of a ‘harmonious nation’. The nineteenth-century compulsory gregarious lifestyle supports the (Burkean) belief that the whole neighborhood can and ought to form into one close unit, and people should live prosperously in a

³⁵ McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, 117.

harmonious manner. In the novel, Austen has relentlessly critiqued the falsehood of this assumption by exposing the contest between the self and the Other at all levels. However, though she ridicules this fantasmal idea of social (national) unity, she affirms its value and endeavors to restore unity in a cynical way. While love between the self and the Other is a rare thing, I am going to show that Austen has strived to mend the broken subject-Other relationship through a *false love of the Other*. And ironically, this false love of the Other helps sustain some *genuine* relationships among people. When communication is about to cease among people in the heat of hatred, the subject will suddenly remember the call of ideology, and re-construct a misrecognized 'love' of the Other. The subject knows its motive full well, but with an innocent mask on the suddenness of this 'love', the subject begins to be kind to the Other again.

The bitter irony in *Pride and Prejudice* shows us that all subjects have an initial desire to interact with people; however, this attempt leads not to love, but to fear and competition (Miss Bingley), pseudo-altruism (Lady Catherine), life-and death struggles (Lizzy and Darcy), or an aggressive intolerance of the Other's advancement (Mrs Bennet). Meanwhile, an ideologized affection does not involve an intention to love anyone, but rather the suspension by the subject of all criticism in order to befriend someone. Žižek calls this phenomenon 'ideological mystification': ideology, in its highest degree, mystically pushes a subject to refuse to listen even to its own voice. The subject simply heeds the pure voice of ideology, and will succeed in being a gregarious social animal³⁶. In this sense, *Pride and Prejudice* openly reveals the secret of ideology: Austen tells us that the best means to reconcile people to one another is *not* through love, but through a reservoir of emotions such as greed and class consciousness. And this ideologized 'false love of the Other' can curiously lead to the *cynical remasking* of reality, and the sudden emergence of 'love' and 'unity' in the social scene.

Austen tells us that, if not for the pure voice of ideology, the general subject-Other relationship can be highly volatile. If circumstances change, people can

³⁶ For example, the most successful, sociable character in the political scene or in business is often a person gifted with a strategic PR personality—i.e. a person who does not value love or the heart in human exchange, but heeds the strategic advice that one should never upset anybody for future, ideological interests.

conveniently ‘adjust’ their past opinions, jump onto the bandwagon, and gossip about—or love—the Other. Lydia’s elopement has led the Bennet family to fall into a state of disgrace. People believe that the Bennets are ‘marked out for misfortune’. Though Lydia gets married, the entire neighborhood is said to have received this piece of news with ‘decent philosophy’ (309). All the spiteful old ladies in Meryton talk with ill-will to ascertain the misery of Lydia’s marriage. However, after Jane and Bingley get engaged, the pure voice of class consciousness leads the whole Meryton community to pronounce that ‘the Bennets [are] the luckiest family in the world’ (360). The sudden change of fortune leads the (spiteful) neighbors to express their good-will instantly. Likewise, class-consciousness alone brings Mrs Bennet to suddenly ‘love’ Darcy. She cannot control herself the moment she learns that Lizzy is to be the wife of the owner of Pemberley,

Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane’s is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!—Oh! my dear Lizzy! pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. (378)

In this sophisticated manifestation of ideology, we might as well say that the subject no longer displays a ‘naïve consciousness’ of her good will. The subject lacks any ironic distance and knows full well that she likes the Other because of her desire for money and status. Readers can sense the false love of the Other, and yet, Mrs Bennet really comes to ‘love’ the Other in a sudden and genuine manner. The subject thinks she *must* love the rich Other in spite of her past dislike. Mrs Bennet represents the fully ideologized subject who can comfortably reveal the secret of its functioning, without the least moral qualms or the internal struggles that Lizzy experiences, or that Charlotte pretends not to have. Without thinking, Mrs Bennet knows she *must* approve of Darcy automatically. Ideological mystification allows cognitive awareness of reality (the subject understands the falseness of this love), however, it mystifies the subject with its imperative voice. The subject believes she has no choice, she simply *has to* accept Darcy (=money, jewels, special licence). Hence, Žizek considers that the critic’s task

is not just the question of seeing things (this is, social reality) as they 'really are, throwing away the distorting spectacles of ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduced itself without this so called 'ideological mystification'. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence (SO 28).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has constructed a world in which many intelligent subjects do understand the distorted nature of this false 'love'. But understanding does not mean awakening, and many of them choose to follow the voice of money and take it as a (falsely) 'natural' choice. Austen shows us that greed can mobilize Mr Collins to love his cousin Elizabeth in a new light. Mr Bennet writes to Mr Collins and advises him to seek reconciliation with Darcy for a very 'natural' reason. His words implies that Collins should 'naturally' side with Darcy because Darcy 'has more to give' (383).

In the end, Austen's story tells us that it is a truth universally acknowledged that one will eventually become reconciled with the rich neighbor. Austen features the speedy reconciliation of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Miss Bingley with Darcy and Elizabeth. Lady Catherine is 'extremely indignant on the marriage of her nephew', and with her abusive language, 'all intercourse was at an end' for some time. However, as soon as Lizzy urges Darcy to seek a reconciliation, Austen writes, 'after a little farther resistance on the part of his aunt, her resentment gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself; and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley' (388). One can easily see that if Lady Catherine truly loves Darcy, she would not have used the abusive language in the first place. Austen offers an alternate cause of her reconciliation: curiosity. If we remember that the privileged subject's curiosity regarding the (inferior) Other is always aligned with a class-oriented desire to see a lack in them, we might as well say this is the real reason why Lady Catherine wants to wait on Darcy and Elizabeth at Pemberley. Her 'curiosity' is another facet of class prejudice, a desire to observe how much damage the lesser gentry class can do to a prestigious family. In other words, the visit is another panoptic trip to perceive, or denounce the inferior class's mismanagement of Pemberley. Austen uses free indirect discourse to expose how Lady Catherine, in her ironical 'reconciliatory' visit to Pemberley, holds on to the notion of class prejudice, and feels 'the pollution' produced 'from the presence of

such a mistress' (388). In the story, 'class pride' prompts Miss Bingley to seek a speedy reconciliation with the rich couple. Miss Bingley is 'deeply mortified by Darcy's marriage', but owing to her class sense (to preserve 'the right of visiting at Pemberley'), 'she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of Georgiana, almost as attentive to Darcy as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth' (387). This 'false love' makes readers feel the restoration of harmony signifies a real failure on the project of reconciliation; however, Austen implies in the story that it has worked wonders to help reestablish broken relationships among people.

With a cynical remasking of the nature of love towards the Other, *Pride and Prejudice* sends us back to a harmonious society. Austen is not unaware of the possibility of genuine recognition among people, but she tells us that it is rare. Amidst all these false regards, the Gardiners love the Darcys. She writes that '[w]ith the Gardiners, [the couple] were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them' (388). As Austen reconstructs a world in which the self and the Other can finally live peacefully together, her story helps cynically restore the Burkean fantasy of social/national harmony. Love or money has at least suppressed disunity, pride and prejudice for a while.

Chapter 5: The Controversy on Progress in *Mansfield Park*

The future is with the slave. It is his destiny to create the community in which everyone accords recognition to everyone else, the community in which spirit attains its end and achieves satisfaction.¹

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen continues her dialogue with the enlightenment project: with its attempt to ‘critique power’, ‘struggle against tradition’, and ‘war against oppression’.² To pursue progress, Austen insists on talking about things that hegemonic power and tradition prefer to keep quiet about: female intellect, class oppression, social change. Austen painstakingly reveals that the upper and lower class likewise are experiencing a confusion of values. In an era of sophisticated nihilism, the rich and the poor alike speak the grand (master) discourse, but in Hegel’s words, their ‘noble-minded’ ideals in fact descend into worldliness and become ‘indistinguishable from the base consciousness’ (PS 559). Austen carefully examines and rejects three types of modern subjectivities, opting for the new ‘language of the servant’. At the end, Austen visualizes, for the first time in her novels, the possibility of a *genuine* reconciliation between the patriarch and the enlightened subjects—only to reveal that this progressive reconciliation is wrought with strong affection, as well as tension.

In the story, Austen ordains two ‘free-willing’ servants to become the triumphant inheritors and reformers of the landed gentry class. To counter the confusion of values, Austen particularly foregrounds the freedom of choice to be servants: for servants speak a language which is fully aware of their heterogeneous identifications and limits. Unlike the masters, they know they are dependent, and they are critical of the Law of the master. Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price have come to distrust the illusory freedom promised by the master discourse. Edmund summons all his willpower to live a modest life, with only seven hundred pounds a year. He learns to give up any desire that is incompatible with his vocation (symbolized by his love for Mary Crawford). If Dr Grant’s business is to endorse a self-serving epicureanism, Edmund’s vocation is to become a *true* servant of the Church. Meanwhile, Fanny is, at first, made a slave; but after her return to the Portsmouth family, Fanny actively

¹ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society* II, 155.

² Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* 4.

prefers her serving spirit to the joy of wild freedom. And she wills herself to help those who are in need or oppressed.

While a villain appeals to the imagination, nobody finds the servants loveable. The dislike of this servant subjectivity can probably account for the poor reception of *Mansfield Park* among the critics. Kingsley Amis calls this an 'immoral book': Fanny is 'a monster of complacency and pride'.³ Mudrick, on the contrary, considers it to be too disastrously moral. Its pietistic tone undermines Austen's usual style of liveliness and wit. And Fanny's 'cold questionless obedience props up a dying world'.⁴ Jane McDonnell finds the book 'disturbing'. In her words, 'the most disturbing aspect of the book would appear to be Austen's endorsement of Fanny's weakness as a covert form of strength, leading to her unjustified recognition and redemption at the end'.⁵ Bernard Paris further explains this slave subjectivity as a survivalist's tactic. He uses Adlerian vocabulary to see Fanny's servility as a defensive strategy: someone who tries to gain acceptance only 'by being useful, by being good, and by attaching herself to a stronger and more favoured member of the family'.⁶ It is an Adlerian 'feminine, submissive style of life': a means of masking hostility, and a mode of self-protection. Thus, '[h]ere is the goodness of a terrified child who dreads total rejection if she does not conform in every way to the will of those in power. It is rigid, desperate, compulsive. Fanny is not actively loving nor benevolent; she is obedient, submissive, driven by her fears and her shoulds. Her goodness provides, more over, the only outlet for her repressed aggressive impulses'.⁷ Susan Gubar further sees Fanny as a Snow White, immobile in her deathly virtue.⁸ Tony Tanner forgets Fanny's diligent rose-cutting and says that he finds *Mansfield Park* to be 'the story of a girl who triumphs by doing nothing'.⁹

It is in this context that I want to re-read *Mansfield Park* as Austen's defense of the servant-subjectivity, and align it with Hegel's enlightenment vision: the rise of the bondsmen. This reading of *Mansfield Park* tries to refute the critics' appraisal of

³ Kingsley Amis, "What Became of Jane Austen" *Spectator* (4 Oct 1957), pp.33-40.

⁴ Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 97.

⁵ Jane McDonnell, "'A Little Spirit of Independence': Sexual Politics and the *Bildungsroman* in *Mansfield Park*" *Novels* 17 (1984 Spring) 197.

⁶ Paris, *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels, a Psychological Approach* 48.

⁷ Paris, *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels, a Psychological Approach* 49.

⁸ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* 165ff.

⁹ Tanner, "Introduction" in *Mansfield Park* ed. Tanner (Penguin 1966) 8.

Fanny as a girl with ‘false’ morality, ‘complacency and pride’, a lady who ‘does nothing’, and covers her ‘aggressive impulses’ with a humble mask so as to survive in a big family. And it also aims at rejecting the idea that ‘servanthood’ has reduced Edmund or Fanny to totally submissive creatures, with ‘cold questionless obedience’, like a ‘Snow White’. I will align the servant’s discursive subjectivity with Lacan’s view: a servant is a fundamentally active and intransigent creature with its secret ‘*jouissance* of speech—of what is said and what is not said’.¹⁰ To explain this clearly, in the nineteenth-century, Hegel locates the slave’s source of resistance to the master in the transforming value of labor, and Lacan revises Hegel’s idea to locate it in the structure of speech. By confronting its wounds, the servant comes to witness the depth and intensity of its self-division or alienation. And once the servant separates itself from the tyrannical master discourse, it can create new master signifiers that are ‘less exclusive, restrictive and conflictual’.¹¹ In the story, Austen dramatizes a servant’s dialectical overcoming of her servile consciousness and her conversion into a legal and rightful citizen. Fanny and Edmund represent the rise of an enlightened subject-position: they do not want to be powerful masters; instead, they admit the presence of lack, and learn to live with the lack of prestige or great wealth. They want to serve others. By examining the various, mutually disjointed, and even contradictory discourses within the self, these subjects have come to problematize the masters. And social change becomes possible with the subject’s valorization of its past sufferings, or its ‘repressed excess of enjoyment’ to remap the existing social system and produce new master signifiers.

Before we proceed any further, we must take note of the fact that Austen’s notion of the servant subjectivity is *not* socio-politically revolutionary. D.W Harding, in a sympathetic reading of the *Mansfield Park*, notices that Fanny (we might as well include Edmund Bertram) ‘allies herself with virtues that are easy to appreciate and reasonably often met with. The result, as one would expect, is a distinct tendency to priggishness’.¹² And Butler says, ‘to see the Evangelical strain in the book as socially

¹⁰ Serge André, “Otherness of the Body” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 88.

¹¹ Bracher, “On the Psychological and Social Function of Language: Lacan’s Theory of the Four Discourses” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 125.

¹² Harding, “The Priggishness of Mansfield Park” in *Jane Austen. Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park. A Casebook* ed. Southam, 213.

radical....is to get the emphasis wrong: for Evangelicalism was an essentially conservative movement' that promoted middle-class stability.¹³ Hence, I would say that Austen's vision of the enlightenment lies not in revolutions (which, according to Lacan, can only create new masters like Marx, or Stalin), but in a shift of individual subject-positions. To Mark Bracher, such a shift 'does not constitute a radical break with tyranny and an accession to freedom'.¹⁴ The importance of this shift lies in the confrontation of the subject's marginalized past, the repressed enjoyment (*a*). The result is that it 'makes it possible to produce a master signifier that is a little less oppressive', because it 'is less absolute, more open, fluid, processual' (124).

In the eyes of Hegel, the sophisticated era of nihilism is related, ironically, not to the misuse of reason, but to the master's *principled* autonomy. The master has every reason to think autonomously, for his principles are good. As Hegel says, the noble-minded consciousness, positively disposed towards altruistic goals and 'negatively to its own selfish purposes, achieves the heroism of service' (PS 559). The subject has 'self-respect and exacts respect from others'. However, change soon occurs for the subject gradually mixes its principles with 'personal ends'. Language plays an important 'operative role' in making the subject sound 'universal and impersonal', thereby masking the biased, 'changing self' (ibid). In Hegel's words, 'in *law* and *command*', the subject hides the 'particular I' to acquire a sense of 'universality' (PS §508, 308). Having arrived at this powerful 'universal' selfhood, the subject enjoys 'a titanic self-consciousness that thinks of itself as being an actual living god' (PS §481, 292). It speaks a 'language of flattery' (PS §511, 559) to seek wealth and favor self-will while it pretends to conform to heroic ideals. As a result, the noble-minded consciousness plays a 'nihilistic game' (PS §521, 317), with 'universal talk and destructive judgment', and eventually becomes indistinguishable from the base consciousness (characterized by a ruthless pursuit or flattery of wealth or status). As we shall see later, the 'witty discourse' perfectly illustrates and exposes how language is fully aware of its 'confused state' as everything becomes void of substance and confounded with its opposite' (ibid).

¹³ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 244.

¹⁴ Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Function of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses" 123.

Hegel believes that, in reaction to the collapse of principles, the future must no longer be constructed on the basis of 'self-certainty', but on an affirmation of 'a real beyond' (§528). It is in this sense that the faithful servant best overthrows the illusion of its independence—in its entrapment by the Other, its interaction with institutional, class practices beyond itself. The servant's subjectivity is first constructed negatively. The servant has to take 'renunciation of recognition' as 'self-recognition', 'self-denial as self-positioning'. However, Hegel shows that such labor eventually produces a new identity, and through this labor 'the *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman' (PS §193, 117). True liberation comes when the servant can, 'through the universalizing process of work, politics and language', disidentify with and resist the status assigned to it by the master. Mary C. Rawlinson concludes that Hegel's analysis ends with the slave's 'conversion into the citizen or legal person': the slave's 'particular consciousness rids himself of the contingency of blood and reconstitutes his relation to the other as one of reciprocal or mutual recognition, guaranteed by the formality of contract'.¹⁵ In Austen's story, the rise of the servants is marked by a wedding contract, after receiving the master's approval.

In Lacan's re-reading of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, he does not talk much about the moral bankruptcy of the master, or the labor of the slave-servant. Instead, he focuses intensely on their distinctive differences of speech. The master invents master-signifiers to assign value and identity to individuals (hence, 'the discourse of the master is...an attempt at totalization'). However, given the fact that the Real (Thing/concept/subject-in-itself) can never be fully signified in the process of symbolization, Lacan suggests that the master signifier 'can never represent the subject completely; there is always some surplus which escapes representation'.¹⁶ We may as well proceed from here to hypothesize the different responses of the master and the slave. On the part of the master, history tells us that the failure of language to represent his 'full' subjectivity has been an annoying business to him. It sets off the master's proliferation of oppressive discourses in an attempt to exhaust/fixate the unspeakable. From words like 'Your majesty', 'Your honor', to

¹⁵ Mary C. Rawlinson, "Levers, Signatures and Secrets" in *Derrida and Feminism*, eds Rawlinson, Feder, Zakin, 73.

¹⁶ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* 106.

the invention of new labels such as ‘Führer’ or the prohibition of certain signifiers from being used in everyday contexts, the master tries to instill fullness to special ‘absolute’ signifiers, and hide the floating nature of language. However, to the slave-servant, this surplus, this hole of the unsayable becomes a welcoming source for resistant consciousness. The slave-servant experiences a dim awareness that its ‘real’ identity can never be what the master claims it to be: a powerless, illegitimate creature. But owing to the inability of language to put this unsymbolizable ‘Real’ (feelings/body/identity) into words, this surplus can be both enabling and disabling. It enables the slave to doubt and challenge the master discourse, but it does not provide the means for the slave to legitimately voice its resistance in the public, symbolic domain. Hence, the slave-servant’s dim awareness of its ‘different’ identity and *jouissance* must remain unsaid, while the words it speaks in public can only be the echoing ‘submissive’ discourse taught by the master. But as Mark Bracher argues, the first step towards the dethronement of the master is to stage an ‘*internal challenge*’ to problematize the infallibility of the master discourse¹⁷, we may as well say that the slave-servant’s dissident consciousness is constructive in providing first hand knowledge (though at this stage somewhat under-theorized) to question the master.

* * *

After *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen now foregrounds the dangers of the enlightened subject’s principled self-certainty. With a genuine desire to recognize people and love altruistic principles, the master believes that he can bestow help in the world—with a strong belief that it would do good to all. In the novel, Sir Thomas represents an altruistic, benevolent nobleman who genuinely cares about others. He has ‘principles’ and ‘pride’ to hope all people that are ‘connected with him [are] in situations of respectability’ (4). He gives ‘friendly advice’ and money to Mrs Price (5). He seeks the consent of Mrs Norris, his wife and Mrs Price before he takes the child. And above all, he debates the pros and cons of the act, for he wants to do something ‘serviceable to Mrs Price and creditable to [themselves]’ (7). He is determined to be the ‘real and consistent patron’ of the child—with an eye on the genuine welfare of the girl’s future, provision, marriage etc. As Hegel points out, at

¹⁷ Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 78.

first, the noble-minded consciousness, positively disposed towards altruistic goals, not only 'achieves the heroism of service', but also wins 'self-respect and exacts respect from others' (PS 559). The whole family immediately enjoys 'the pleasures of so benevolent a scheme' (8). However, Austen also draws us to notice that, as the 'cultured individual exercises his ability and talents in a cultured world', in 'making his mark in the world' he in effect helps to make the world in which he makes his mark' (PS §490, 299). Simply put, the subject's (altruistic) remapping of the world or people's lives always comes with the dynamics of his self-interest. In Sir Thomas's initial objection to taking the child in his family, readers can sense that his altruism is already involved with an eye on self-interest and class boundaries. Miss Price must not be the wife of a Mr Bertram. The story quickly tells us how altruistic acts can eventually degenerate into an 'altruistic' subjugation of the other.

In the story, Austen invites her readers to listen to the operative role of the 'language of flattery' and notice the subtle, contradictory elements in the altruistic, noble-minded consciousness. The principled benevolence drives a master to speak about the 'duty' to improve the condition of the poor (the asylum-seekers, the immigrants), while at the same time, he can insist on personal or class interests and openly decrees discrimination and status differences. Sir Thomas wants Fanny to have 'a regular instructress' (9). But Sir Thomas also talks about the importance of *not* loving the 'inferior' subject too much, the need for a regulated 'distinction...to be made between the girls'. Miss Price must be reminded that 'she is not a *Miss Bertram*'. His wealthy children must be good, and it is anticipated that the girl will have 'gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner' (10). This self-flattering language is problematic in the sense that it ensures the reproduction of the social system and personal interests by hiding itself behind a 'helpful', 'unselfish' 'benevolent' discourse. The master is blind to its bias as his good deed raises his enunciating subject to be a respectable one. As a result, the subject enjoys the power to re-define the nature, differences, distance and relations between people, which subsequently justifies the hierarchical distribution of spaces and resources to the less privileged subjects. Austen reminds us that this language describes a relation that is based not on facts or logical reasoning, but on a stereotyped memory with selective representation and exaggeration. Sir Thomas has

never seen Fanny Price, but he believes that Fanny would be mean. And after Fanny's arrival, Sir Thomas can see that her 'air was not vulgar, her voice was sweet', and 'her countenance was pretty' (12). However, the noble position of the speaking subject is so self-flattering that it hinders the subject from noting its discursive error, or listening to the true (superior) voice of the girl. As the altruistic subject can only notice his good-will in helping (as well as depreciating) the poor, though Fanny has disappointed Sir Thomas's anticipated 'vulgarity of manner', his (oppressive) opinion towards the lower class remains unchanged.

Sir Thomas's attempt to highlight Fanny's differences is carried out by his 'faithful assistant'—Mrs Norris—to an extent of sadistic marginalization in the family. Many critics suggest that Sir Thomas's errors lie in an ignorance of his family condition and his mistrust of Mrs Norris¹⁸; however, I believe that Sir Thomas's 'benevolent' command and Mrs Norris's sadistic terrorism are the two sides of the same coin. In various places in the novel, Austen reveals to us that Sir Thomas is not as ignorant as he seems to be. He has first hand information on Mrs Norris's maltreatment of Fanny after he witnesses that her room has been without a fire for many years. He intervenes and improves her condition, but he also defends Mrs Norris. Beneath his 'benevolent' mask, he justifies class inequality and the violent enforcement of this difference. He thinks the unfortunate girl's 'good nature' will lead her to understand that it is 'justified abuse'—originating from the 'good intention' of the upper class (i.e. himself and aunt Norris). He comments on the 'misplaced distinction' Mrs Norris gives his daughters, but he also says, 'the principle is good in itself'. Though he notices unfairness ('mediocrity of condition which *seemed* to be [Fanny's] lot'), he tells Fanny that it is 'kindly meant'. In turn, Sir Thomas specifically orders Fanny to love her torturers, no matter how sadistic they appear to be. Fanny must 'treat...aunt Norris with the respect and attention that are due to her' (313).

Mansfield Park is a strong challenge to this confusion of values. Austen exposes the fall of the noble-minded consciousness: it flatters itself, and comes to praise the unkind, mean gestures in the name of good principles, or kind intentions. In Hegel's

¹⁸ See Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* 96-7 and Tonny Tanner, *Jane Austen* 152.

words, the notion of goodness now ‘receives its own self merely as a name’, it becomes ‘the powerless being that sacrifices its own self’ (PS §521, 316). Simply put, though the subject acts in the name of kindness, kindness is sacrificed in the subject’s ‘good’ action. Austen does not hesitate to show her readers the consequences of this confusion: the obstruction of true goodness. And that is the real reason why, in the story, Sir Thomas’s intended goodness is always obstructed. His affability can never win him affection, his befriending gestures are never endearing, his (colonial) kingdom is never truly honorable. His ‘noble’ service to others always retains a strong self-interest. In the domestic context, Sir Thomas’s gravity bespeaks an unconscious self-dignifying effort that does not go with his amiable intent. Fanny’s remarks mirror the obstruction of happiness due to his presence: ‘There was never much laughing in his presence...I cannot recollect our evenings formerly were ever merry, except when my uncle was in town’ (197). In the political scene, Sir Thomas flatters himself with his glorious adventure in Antigua, but Austen reveals to us that he goes there with one dark intent—to seek wealth. For the ‘recent losses on his West India Estate, in addition to his eldest son’s extravagance’ (24), Sir Thomas becomes short of money. It becomes ‘expedient to go to Antigua for the better arrangement of his affairs’ (32). In the name of noble-minded ideals, Austen leads us to sympathetically see that Sir Thomas has degenerated into a kind of deceptive confusion. In the story, Sir Thomas’s ‘well-meaning’ action never works: communication or love neither prosper at home nor abroad. Sir Thomas simply heightens the barriers in the family and in the West Indies. True goodness is sacrificed, and ‘his absence was unhappily most welcome’ to all (32).

Mansfield Park also highlights another language—the ‘language of ignoble flattery’—in dealing with power and wealth (PS 560). This time, Austen tells us that there are no subtle contradictions to be found in this language, for it displays gross falsehood and inconsistencies through and through. The speaker does not mind being discovered to be inconsistent, or be seen as a liar, or a flatterer. In fact, the success of this subject lies in its power of turning inconsistencies, lies and flatteries into ‘truth’, or a new version of reality. Lies and inconsistencies can always be explained away with new systems of appreciation, new values applied to them. The conversion of values is so smooth that gaps are destined to disappear without trace, or new

interpretations can be attached on unceasingly. The *deliberate* confusion of goodness and badness is so complete that what the 'beneficent' subject 'pronounces to be an essence, it knows to be expendable, to be without any intrinsic being' (PS §520, 315). Unlike the noble-minded consciousness—which has a healthy regard for good values, and whose 'noble flattery' with power can, at least, be read as a defense of its original state of being (like Sir Thomas's defense of his class interests or economic interests in Antigua), the subject who employs base flattery has an eye only on winning (illegitimate) power and wealth. Its strong defense of hierarchy cannot be original—for the subject does not belong to this class. The subject knows that it is using other people's power and wealth; nevertheless, it entertains a powerful 'arrogance' so that the subject conveniently forgets its original identity. With this disruption of identity (in which self-interest leads the subject to forsake the 'self', forget its root to seek a more glamorous status), Hegel considers that 'all stability' has vanished in this subject (PS §519, 314).

In *Mansfield Park*, this ignoble flattery with power and wealth is represented by the character Mrs Norris. Under the name of being 'benevolent' and 'useful', Mrs Norris speaks a language that is not afraid to be known as mean, mercenary and manipulative. Austen reveals to us that this ignoble benevolence is based not on principles or affection but on a love of power ('directing' others). This love is supplemented by a love of money which leads Mrs Norris to spend the money of her friends instead of her own (8). The subject has no intention of hiding her base consciousness, her mercenary desires. Sir Thomas knows Mrs Norris is quite 'hardy'. Maria knows Mrs Norris' habit of 'spunging' people's resources (106). Mrs Norris is not afraid to openly contradict herself. In the opening of the novel, Mrs Norris proposes the 'benevolent act' of adopting Fanny, but she gives unobvious excuses for not keeping her, and refuses to have her even after the death of Mr Norris. In the name of 'economy', Fanny should leave Portsmouth by coach, 'under the care of any creditable person that may chance to be going' (8). As a result, Sir Thomas wonders at her 'refusing to do any thing for a niece, whom she had been so forward to adopt' (30-1). However, she manages to get away with it by 'converting' her meanness to a concern for the 'future welfare' of the Bertram household ('she took early care to make him...understand that whatever she possessed was designed

for their family' 31). Sir Thomas is complimented by these words, and agrees on keeping Fanny. Another instance is that, in the visit to Sotherton, Mrs Norris flatters Mrs Rushworth, and in turn gets 'a little heath from the gardener', 'a few pheasant's eggs and a cream cheese from the housekeeper' (106), which she tells Fanny to take special care of. Maria questions the extent of Mrs Norris' plundering of others' resources; however, Mrs Norris can always successfully portray her 'greed' as an act of humble 'acceptance' of other's goods. People 'force' her to accept those things. With a constant reminder that her 'sole desire is to be of use to [the Bertram] family' (30), to 'prevent waste' and to make 'the most of things' (141), and with a compliment of Sotherton that suits Maria's taste, Mrs Norris's glib speech represents how ignoble flattery can afford to be blatantly inconsistent, and is always accepted with good humor. In the story, Sir Thomas is pleased to know that Mrs Norris can detect lazy servants (steward 'Baddely' is 'behind hand' 180), and can run the house in his absence. Hence, a little selfishness or greed is often overlooked. After the removal of 'the theatre', nobody says anything when Mrs Norris happily takes home all the curtains for 'she happen[s] to be particularly in want of green baize' (195). 'Foiled by her evasions, disarmed by her flattery' (190), everybody *knowingly* develops a strong tolerance of Mrs Norris's confusion of values: back-stabbing in the name of shrewdness, meanness feigned as benevolence, greed masked as conservation. Austen implies that the landed gentry class, the Bertram family—under the ignoble flatterer's guidance—is bound to fall apart.

Mrs Norris does not belong to the upper-landed gentry class, but Austen presents her as the strongest defender of hierarchy, and the most sadistic torturer of the poor. Lady Bertram finds Fanny very companionable, but Mrs Norris 'had no affection for Fanny, and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time'. Mrs Norris is 'red with anger' because Fanny has a chance to use a carriage (221). In Mrs Norris's speech to Fanny Price, Austen characterizes her words with a totalizing discourse of 'Gratitude'. 'Gratitude' becomes the master signifier to define and justify her ignoble treatment towards the underprivileged ones. To Mrs Norris, the inferior class should always be grateful. As they do not deserve any respect, hence everything is allowed. The disciplining of the body (walk, work, rose-cutting), resources (no horse-riding, no fire), and spatial distribution (of the attic) is justified as Mrs Norris equates Fanny

with a 'beggar subjectivity': a beggar cannot be a chooser, and it must love the giver. Austen wants her readers to notice that the mechanism of this discourse is that it uses the concept of (limited, conditional) 'giving' to develop an (unconditional, totalized) obligation of 'love'. The discourse of Gratitude can articulate and promote a power relationship: the rich can give a little and can receive much. In turn, it heightens the status discrepancy between the gift-bearer and the gift-giver and achieves *closure*. The subject rewrites the identity and situation of the poor (for example, Mrs Norris conveniently forgets the fact that Fanny would still be fine, or happier, if she has been left in Portsmouth). By highlighting the act of giving (limited help), this discourse of 'Gratitude' has the power to *foreclose* any complaints, to impose any system of knowledge or treatment on the other and still demand reverence. This language defines and delimits the conditions of the Other's speech. It exacts from Fanny a uniform abstraction of response ('Yes, madam'). In the novel, Austen shows us how oppressive this 'gratitude discourse' can be. To be late is ungrateful, to be slow or lazy is unmindful, to speak up is irreverent. This master-signifier gives her a 'surplus' to imply that she is the benefactor, and she can make or break Fanny Price (even though the real patron is Sir Thomas). In the context of ignoble flattery, Mrs Norris's harsh language to Fanny is contrasted with her language to Sir Bertram's children: it is a humble language that recognizes her limits, the condition of her inferior status. Mrs Norris defines herself as a 'helper'. She secures the good will of the other by flattering those children's vanity, by making them believe that 'they had no faults' (35). Maria is 'an angel' (39).

If Sir Thomas's language obstructs goodness, Austen desires her readers to notice that this ignoble language introduces the *perversion* of goodness (or in Hegel's words, 'what it pronounces to be an essence, it knows to be expendable, to be without any intrinsic being' PS §520, 315). All concepts can be twisted by the ignoble subject to become good or bad according to personal preference. Mrs Norris loves Maria, so what is good for Maria must be bad for Fanny Price. Beauty in Maria is an admirable quality, but a beautiful Fanny will only annoy Mrs Norris. Mrs Norris loves to practice economy; however, given the fact that a theatre brings 'very little expense to any body, and none at all to herself', Mrs Norris is delighted to give her approval, and immediately takes 'up her abodes in theirs' to avoid living 'at her

own cost' (129). Upon knowing that Fanny has been invited by Mrs Grant, she fumes: 'remember, whatever you are, you must be the lowest and the last' (221). Austen's language invites her readers to punctuate and give stress to these words (*lowest* and *last*), and we are pushed to notice the flatterer's deliberate suppression of merits according to personal dislike and class standing. This sentence also leads us to note the judgement of the 'good' people: though Edmund is angry, Sir Thomas finds it unfair to depreciate Fanny, no one takes any active part to stop Mrs Norris—for it is within the interest of the 'noble-minded consciousness' to feel superior (whether this is deserved or not). In this sense, the noble-minded and the base consciousness are united in their 'destructive judgment', and join hands in this 'nihilistic game' of value-disruption (PS §521, 317).

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen presents to the readers the rise of a seductive, witty and nihilistic consciousness found only in modern subjects. The bankruptcy of the noble consciousness in the old generation (represented by Sir Thomas, Aunt Norris, the Admiral and Dr Grant) has resulted in a radical change of moral outlook on the part of the young people. However, instead of carrying on a critical and reflective dialogue with the past (hence having a chance to promote a transformative practice), the story tells us that these young people want to run away from it. The ironic truth is that the 'liberated act' of disengagement has allowed these subjects to adopt a *continuous* stance towards the old tradition and the master discourse. The stability of the system is simply reproduced: the dominant subject (be it the patriarch, or the playboy) or the dominant signifier (Moral doctrine in the past, Money, Alcohol, Sex in modern times) can still enjoy its supreme authority. It still enslaves other ordinary subjects or signifiers, and neglects the voice of the suppressed. By replacing the old ethics of 'Benevolence' with the new ethics of 'Game', the new generation does not alter the tyranny of the master-position, and merely shifts the distribution of its force by changing the master signifier (e.g. 'usefulness' to 'victory' or 'cool'). With little respect for plebian values, plain faces, unattractive bodies, or the losers, the overweight, the marginalized, disabled subjects, the young people's new game enhances the old values of the society (the love of dominance, established positions, ease, extravagance. In fact, Henry's desire to possess women's hearts is not unlike Sir Thomas' desire to conquer land). And in speaking the very *same* language of

flattery towards wealth and beauty (though they once despised these pursuits in the old generation), these young people become 'profoundly rebellious' (PS §517, 314). In Findlay's words, Hegel believes that their 'witty' discourse can sufficiently mirror this state of mind: 'All values becomes transvalued' in the sense that people speak a 'disintegrated brilliance' that is fully aware of its confused state (PS §523, 560). Hegel optimistically reckons that a witty discourse can dialectically negate disintegration: the subject 'sees the vanity of treating all things as vain, and so becomes serious' (PS 525). While Austen coincides with Hegel in seeing this possibility (by arranging a positive change for the Crawfords), she rejects these self-proclaimed 'liberated' subjects by revealing the cause of their downfall: their language of 'extreme rebellion' (PS §517, 314).

From the very moment of their first appearance, the Crawfords and young Bertrams (excluding Edmund) typify a new, 'liberated' generation. Apart from Edmund, no young Bertrams appreciate Sir Thomas's lifeless gravity that comes with his benevolent principle, and none of them have a high respect for their aunt Norris's false benevolence. Meanwhile, the Crawfords are disillusioned with the immoral ways of the Admiral and epicurean habits of Dr Grant. By disengaging themselves from moral signifiers like 'benevolence' or 'usefulness' (which they have witnessed to be problematic and false), these young people speak a new, disillusioned, skeptical language with regard to 'Love', or moral ideals. Mary Crawford has no high opinion of love, and Maria Bertram simply marries for prestige and wealth. Apart from Edmund, none of the Crawfords and Bertrams adores moral rules. By alienating themselves from moral signifiers, the new people speak a language that confuses the traditional category of noble or ignoble consciousness. In other words, this language is 'as much the reverse of what these characterizations are supposed to be: 'the noble consciousness is ignoble and repudiated, just as the repudiated consciousness changes round into nobility which characterizes the most highly developed freedom of self-consciousness' (PS §521, 317). Simply put, these young subjects repudiate the corruption and the selfishness of the 'noble-minded' generation: they want to seek a new freedom. This free search ends up endorsing an egocentric sovereignty which easily degenerates into selfishness and corruption. But this time, corruption is praised by the young people

as a positive freedom to enact their own will (in Hegel's words, changes round into 'nobility'). Mary Crawford considers herself a free woman to do what she likes. And Henry Crawford always considers himself to have the freedom to woo any woman he chooses. Instead of devoting themselves to being of use to others or to the Parliament, everything is now a 'game'—with victory as the goal, and self-gratification as the end. Maria, engaged though she is, does not mind competing with Julia for Henry's affection, and Henry wants to have fun with both sisters, and would like to fall in love with Fanny as a 'game'. *Mansfield Park* reveals to the readers that the cycle is complete as the new generation's 'free games' are just as corrupt as the old generation's notion of 'kind service' to others.

Austen's novel implies that, though the new generation seems to be less tyrannical and more tolerant on the surface (by replacing Authority with the master signifier 'Game'), they still speak a master discourse with a structural disregard for the ordinary and the oppressed elements. The new people remain in thrall to the pursuit of one dominant signifier ('Success'), the central signifier for a game. In the novel, the Bertrams (excluding Edmund) and the Crawfords love winners; they do not particularly value the insignificant, the unprivileged or the weak. And Austen repeatedly tells us that these young people feel too good about themselves to pay attention to inferior subjects. From the first day, the Bertram sisters reject Fanny for she is small and 'ignorant' (18). They use the poor girl only to carry out some errands, or force her to play in their theatre. As for the Crawfords, Mary's opinion on shipping her harp shows how much respect she has for plebian values (58). She is surprised by the 'sturdy independence of country customs' in refusing to fetch her harp. In that light, it is not surprising that the Crawfords' first discussion on Fanny is on her status of being 'out' or 'not out'. The importance of this question lies in its power to include or exclude her in the 'Game' of social exchange. The 'not out' ladies are socially inferior or negligible. They are insignificant (with 'close bonnet and demure air' 51). Having decided that Fanny's status is 'not out' (i.e. insignificant), the Crawfords are happy to mix mostly with the Bertrams. Fanny is never invited to the Grants' house to dinner until all the sisters have left for Sotherton.

Another instance tells us about the liberated generation's opinion of rank. Edmund is eager to tell Mary about Fanny's brother at sea, and about William's superior Captain Marshall. But Mary Crawford's answer represents how the new people's attitude towards hierarchy proves to uphold a continuous (snobbish) stance with the old generation: 'we know very little of inferior ranks. Post captains may be very good sort of men, but they do not belong to *us*' (60). In this new language, the traditional respect towards power is replaced by a disillusioned, independent critique (the admirals are implied to be vice-filled creatures). However, the love of independence leads them to flatter power and wealth all the same. They feel that it is better 'to be a man of fortune at once with horses and grooms' at their command than to be men of action or integrity (237). The new people do not see power as good, but they see dependence, powerlessness or inferiority as definitely bad. To feel good and stay in the game, they come to identify with the admirals instead of the captains, though they reckon captains can be a 'good sort of men'. It is in this sense that Hegel's vision accurately reveals how the new subjectivity is characterized by a 'rebellious' *self-loss*: 'everything is outwardly the reverse of what it is for itself; and again, it is not in truth what it is for itself, but something else than it wants to be' (PS §521, 317). In opposition to the previous, positive flattery of power (like Aunt Norris), the new language of flattery is crystallized by an ambivalent, rebellious stance: the admiral or Mr Rushworth is and is not what Mary Crawford admires. Though she sometimes expresses sympathy towards the poor, downward class mobility is never endorsed by Mary. Edmund Bertram is and is not the man that she wants to have. In the story, Mary Crawford's theory (of love and marriage in particular) represents how a rebellious mind 'as much alienates its own self, as it forms itself into its opposite and in this way inverts it' (ibid). Hence, many critics have mistakenly drawn on a comparison between Elizabeth Bennet and Mary Crawford—while Mary Crawford's subjectivity is actually closer to Charlotte Lucas in her witty inversion of values.¹⁹

In the Hegelian sense, 'wit' refers not only to the 'liveliness' of the mind or 'playfulness' (269), but to the expression of the subject's rebellious, 'nihilistic game

¹⁹ For example, Trilling says, 'to outward seeming, Mary Crawford of Mansfield Park is another version of Elizabeth Bennet' ('Mansfield Park' in *Jane Austen, Casebook* ed. Southam) 221.

which it plays with itself' (PS §521, 317). Wit refers *not* to critical sharpness in the style of Elizabeth Bennet. Wit can be mild and smooth, but it manifests a free talk about the notion of good and bad, and the confusion of good and bad notions to give support to an absolute inversion of values. Wit is a language of the 'disintegrating consciousness' in which the new people thoroughly understand its senselessness, its 'confused state', and find it delightful by engaging themselves with nonsense, convenience and enjoyment. This 'disintegrated brilliance' is characterized by the words of Henry and Mary Crawford in the novel. Henry Crawford can cover the whole gamut of 'the serious and the silly, the trivial and the profound, the lofty and the infamous' (PS 560)—as shown in his witty, eloquent speeches on Shakespeare and the Prayer book, his skills in property management, acting and wooing. With 'good moral taste' and a complete lack of shame, he can talk sense and nonsense. He respects marriage: 'Nobody can think more highly of the matrimonial state than myself' (43); but his respect for the marital institution makes him like Mary Bertram 'the better for [her engagement]. An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged one. She is satisfied with herself' (45). His idea of falling in love is marked by a desire to remain out of love. 'Love' is sought by him for a self-flattering, nonsensical reason: to 'amuse [himself]...on the days that [he does] not hunt' (229). He plans to love Fanny only for 'a fortnight', and this 'will not do her any harm'. A 'harmless' flirtation means that he just wants to make her 'look kindly' at him, and make her feel when he goes away that 'she shall never be happy again' (231). The inclusion and inversion of what is good and bad, what is nonsensical and serious, what is harmful and harmless make Fanny Price conclude that this kind of person 'could do nothing without a mixture of evil' (302). Henry knows that 'constancy' is a valuable merit on its own and is essential in winning Fanny's heart, or being a good preacher. However, 'constancy' is placed in a game context for the sake of self-flattery, to be mixed with nonsensical ideas such as inconstancy and self-important capriciousness. He says that if he were a preacher, he could only preach 'after being anxiously expected for half a dozen Sundays together; but not for a constancy; it would not do for a constancy' (341). Duckworth correctly points out that Henry's 'imagined picture of a future career as a clergyman not only contradicts Edmund's repeated insistence on the duties of office, at Sotherton and during the

conversation about Thornton Lacey, but reveals an entirely different, histrionic conception of the preacher's role, in which the clergyman is an actor, his pulpit a stage, and the sermon a playscript'.²⁰ Henry represents how the new generation *enjoys* the witty perversion of values: the good and the bad are at first differentiated; however, he reckons that 'the good does not lose its value because it may be associated with the bad' (PS §523, 318; like the mixing of preaching and vanity, acting). Furthermore, he believes that the *opposite* of the good is the 'condition' and 'necessity' of the good (e.g. vanity and the skills of acting are essential for a preacher). By doing so, what is 'good' becomes 'the reverse of itself, or conversely, the 'bad' is the 'excellent' (PS §523, 319). A constant preacher can only be bad.

In the novel, Mary Crawford's 'free speech' typifies the climax of the disillusioned, witty discourse. Lionel Trilling points out how Mary's 'moral impersonation' is the 'first brilliant example of a distinctively modern type, the person who cultivates the *style* of sensitivity, virtue and intelligence'.²¹ With no desire to honor the corrupted 'noble' consciousness (after the examples of Dr Grant and the Admiral) and the 'ignoble' consciousness (after her many friends' sad, mercenary marriages), Mary's voice stands for a modern, independent choice—to relinquish all commitments and to be guided by *her* own judgement. 'There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence for me, I am not born to sit still and do nothing. If I lose the game, it shall not be from not striving for it' (243). The subject may not be immoral, but moral scruples do not matter very much. Henry's two-week womanizing attempt to woo Fanny is treated by Mary as a light-hearted game, fully approved by her and is labeled as 'moderation itself' (231). In this endorsement of everybody's (selfish) 'striving-for-self', the ironic fact is that it has 'its own being-for-self for object as an out-and-out "other", and yet, at the same time, directly as its own self—itsself as an "other"...in the form of an absolute antithesis and a completely indifferent existence of its own' (PS §520, 316). To explain this clearly: the subject refuses to submit itself to the Other's law, it chooses to seek independence and freedom—which, in the capitalistic context, means going after Wealth (an 'out-and-out other'). In the story, Mary's idea ('A large income is

²⁰ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 69.

²¹ Trilling, "Mansfield Park" in *Jane Austen A Casebook*, ed. Southam, 227.

the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of' 213) signifies the capitalistic option—for Money can 'give self-conscious independence and freedom of choice to all' (PS 560). In this being-for-'self' (=independence=money), the subject aims at self-gratification and is enslaved. Ironically, it becomes *indifferent* to its own likes, dead to its feelings in its daily toil or love of capital—in the name of enacting its well-being-for-itself (c.f. Charlotte Lucas 'wisely did not hear' her husband, chose a room 'where Mr Collins could be forgotten' PP 156; her comment on marriage is that 'it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person' whom one is going to marry—for people will grow to become 'sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation'; 'Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance' PP 23).

In *Mansfield Park*, Mary thinks marriage is important, but it is a 'take-in', a 'maneuvering business' (46). In the final analysis, money and status are more valuable than personal feelings—for love, 'accomplishment or good quality in the person' can be deceiving and unreliable (46). The ironic thing is that the quest for self-independence through Money has come full circle: freedom and individuality are both denied. As Findlay puts it,

In the pursuit of wealth an individual's personality becomes enslaved to the chance personality of another. What he personally is becomes utterly impersonal, a commodity like others to be bought and sold. Feeling that everything essential is reduced to unessentiality, the individual becomes profoundly rebellious. (PS 560)

From the liberal pursuit of self-certainty and validation, the subject now sees that it has no certainty, and only money can validate its value. Its private judgment or feeling does not matter ('completely indifferent existence to its own'). The emptied subjectivity means the subject feels 'the most profound dejection as well as of extreme rebellion' (PS §517, 314)—in the sense that the most important, substantial 'I' 'should' now be a substanceless, commodifiable 'I'. Mary's view alternately mirrors this contradictory dejection and celebratory, rebellious freedom: all woman should not 'throw themselves away' and should 'marry as soon as they can do it to advantage' (43). The 'I' is a transactional item to bring happiness. But she is depressed by the knowledge that money is *not* happiness: her friend Flora is not happy. And Janet (who marries Mr Fraser for money) is not happy, and their family is in a state of constant domestic upheaval. However, Mary Crawford reveals to us

that the disillusioned modern mind has no motive to relinquish a servile ‘(in)dependence’. Zizek explains the mechanism of a disillusioned, ‘liberating’ ‘fetishistic worship’ of subjectivity through money in this way,

Distortion...is already at work in the social reality itself....on an everyday level, the individuals know very well that there are relations between people behind the relations between things. The problem is that in their social activity itself, in what they are *doing*, they are *acting* as if money, in its material reality, is the immediate embodiment of wealth as such. They are fetishists in practice, not in theory. What they ‘do not know’, what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity—in the act of commodity exchange—they are guided by fetishistic illusion. (SO 31)

Mary’s emancipated statements (‘good dinners’ and ‘large parties’ will recover any ruined subject’s social footing [457], ‘nothing were a security for matrimonial comfort!’ [361], ‘A clergyman is nothing’ [92]) capture the full flavor of the capitalistic worship of money. In the story, she *knows* that money cannot redeem the fallen state of the adulterous couple, and Edmund is a respectable clergyman. But Mary typifies the distorted state of the modern mind. The fetishistic illusion is deeply ingrained. The new generation cannot leave behind the fetishistic practice to return to a world without commodity exchange. In that light, Mary is *acting* as if money can buy her happiness, can bring her brother back to a decent recovery of status—with a helpless fear to confront an uncommodifiable world, a world in which money cannot bring her the harp, or confront the real relations between people beyond their financial transactions.

Austen echoes Hegel in believing that these nihilistic subjects will, at one point, come to see the vanity of their pursuit; but she does not have high hopes for their reformation. As the subject reduces all people and things to monetary terms, this act voids the subject of its independent uniqueness and enables constant (burdensome) comparisons to take place between the self and the other (symbolized by the London gossips: who has the biggest house etc). The insecurity and weary comparisons lead the subject to see that ‘it is itself vain’ (PS §526, 320). The subject becomes serious and has a chance to reform its values. It is in this sense that we can understand why the Crawford brother and sister can come to admire Fanny Price: a subject with the firmest moral views, and the strongest anchor on value-differentiation. Mary notices that Fanny ‘is as good a little creature as ever lived, and has a great deal of feeling’

(231). Austen has distinctively singled out how Mary has consoled Fanny many times. With 'pointed attention', Mary talks to Fanny and 'endeavor[s] to raise her spirits, in spite of being out of spirits herself' (147). Mary is loud in her approval of Henry's choice of selecting Fanny as his wife. 'The more I think of it,' she cried, 'the more am I convinced that you are doing quite right...[Fanny Price] is the very one to make you happy. Your wicked project upon her peace turns out a clever thought indeed' (294-5). And Henry rejoices in his 'new' identity: to develop a 'virtuous' game through his regard for Fanny. It rids him of the tiresome need to posit himself on the basis of vain, affection-less 'romantic' conquests. His abilities are channeled in better directions: to be useful to his tenants, and to William.

However, Austen leads us to see that the subject's rebellious language is too deeply wrought to the mind. A little trigger is all it needs, and the (nihilistic) subject will 'behold itself outside of itself and rent asunder...everything that is called law, good and right' (PS §517, 314). Maria's 'repulsive' coldness upsets Henry, and 'in this spirit he [begins] the attack' to re-conquer her (468). With a desire to lose himself in the joy of Victory, and no intention to return her affection, Henry's success completes his ruin. Mary praises Fanny, but she freely blames Fanny for Henry's downfall. In the story, Austen arranges the playful smile of Mary Crawford to undo her charm. This smile is significant in the sense that it is an alien, impersonal smile that does not come from Mary Crawford's feelings (she is 'extremely red' at that time 458). In fact, this mask-like smile unveils the subject's helpless and emptied personality, and, in a glimpse, exposes the fetishistic power she now embodies: the smile symbolizes the arrogant power of independent Wealth which attempts 'to invite' a subject, 'in order to subdue' it (459). Once subdued, it tells the subject that it has a rebellious means to defy all social and moral customs, to measure human relationships in terms of 'prospects'. Edmund's scolding is just a 'pretty good lecture', his enthusiasm will one day win him the promotion to become 'a celebrated preacher in some great society' (458). As the human eye—the clergyman's eye—stares at the stark cruel, inhuman, insolent face of Wealth, 'the charm is broken' (456). Edmund does not feel that he knows Mary Crawford anymore.

Austen's decision to destroy the Crawfords has angered many critics.²² But the crux lies in Austen's foresight that these subjects will refuse to part with the position of mastery, or give up the love of an 'autonomous', masterly ego. These people do not want to undermine their dominance and their self-flattering tendencies. In short, as they love to preserve their comforts, they would not want to construct any egalitarian beliefs, or promote a healthier, less restrictive, exclusive social order. In *Mansfield Park*, the new generation can accept change, but they refuse to change enough to relinquish the love of privileges (Money, Accomplishments, Victory, Beauty). In turn, they make these values 'function as master signifiers around which a new (totalizing, imperialistic) system is constituted'.²³ Henry and Mary have long known the wearisome tyranny of positing their beings by identifying with master-values like Wealth or Conquest. Henry changes enough to admire Fanny, but he has merely shifted his pursuit of 'women' for 'virtue'—without abandoning the love of masterly dominance ('Conquest'). The slightest provocation is enough to drive him to act beside himself to re-conquer Maria's heart. In the meantime, Austen represents enough growth in Mary for her to reject pure wealth, and Mary demands that her partner must have good 'character and manners'. He must 'authorise a hope of the domestic happiness' she has 'acquired at Mansfield Park' (469). She has also become tired of 'vanity, ambition'. However, Austen reveals to us that the 'enlightened' lady still wants to find a wealthy subject ('idle heir') who will inherit a prestigious title (she 'resolved against attaching herself to a younger brother'). Bounded by fetishistic illusion and disillusionment, Mary's unhappiness represents the *ennui* of the master-figure. Her previous active spirit ('I must move...resting fatigues me' 96) is gone, and she ends up as a wealthy lady who *prefers* to sit still and stay at home. However, it is remarkable for readers to note that the master finds this wearisome mastery preferable to the act of promoting any suppressed discourse or subjects.

²² Austen's deliberate refutation of the Crawford's master morality upsets many critics. Mudrick is a famous defender of Mary Crawford, 'Mary prefers people and society, ...The fact is that Mary has a powerful interest in her human environment: not a shallow or false interest, but detailed, immediate, impatient with generalities. To Fanny's large, solemn, uncomfortable thoughts about nature and morality, Mary counterposes her own cool and yet not unkind curiosity about everyone she meets' (*Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 162).

²³ Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 63.

After the 'noble', 'ignoble' and the 'liberated' consciousness, Austen then presents to the readers another type of subjectivity: the plebian. The plebians aspire to move up the social ladder; however, they fail to do so owing to a lack of resources or capital. In turn, the plebians can voice the bitterest critique of the established subjects and defend the superiority of plebian culture, while secretly longing for an entry into the upper class. Their self-division (Why am I what you're saying that I am?) may rise to a pronounced hatred to subvert the master's values (Goodness, Law, Order), but their desire actually lies in gaining an excluded part of their being: i.e. to become the masters. Hence, while the plebians can be critical or subversive in speech or in action, they are in solidarity with the master discourse. In Bracher's words, '[t]his solidarity manifests itself in the quest of desire for an object that will satisfy it, the wish of anxiety for security and stability, the search of meaninglessness for a meaning or identity'.²⁴ History often shows us that people love to mistake the insightful plebians for reformers in the society. But the sad truth is that these bitter critics, after freeing people from their enthrallment to the old system of knowledge, will follow the same corrupt, tyrannical, old master-system, for the plebians' ultimate longing lies in the search for a masterly system (which is *not* produced by itself) to affirm their identity and importance. In the political context, the rise of the poorest people or proletariat may overthrow the established class, or the feudal aristocrats through violent measures. However, the system of power in those countries often remains the same: the poor people simply become new kings and courtiers, or 'aristocratic' proletariats. By rejecting master signifiers like 'Tradition', 'Ancestry', they cause massive social upheaval, destroy the existing ruling class, but the solidarity with the master's love of dominance is not broken. The language of flattery in dealing with wealth and power is repeated instead of being negated. In short, the self-defeating mechanism lies in the plebians' intrinsic, self-divided refusal and *dependence* on the master-system (Power, Status, Wealth). What rouses them to action is what tames them, for their ultimate need is the attainment of a status that satisfied their longing and gives them a 'secure meaning that can overcome anxiety and give a sense of stable, respectable identity' (ibid).

²⁴ Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 67.

Mansfield Park embodies Austen's distrust of the plebians. Mrs Price's discontentment originates from her gentry class background to become a lieutenant's wife. In turn, Austen shows us that maladjustment has sunk her into an easy, passive indifference to either the luxury of her sisters' life, or the improvement of her own. Fanny's perspective reveals the harsh truth that a graceful woman can become a 'partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern' (390). Her mismanagement typifies how the divided, lacking body cannot follow the master signifiers—Law, Order, Governance, though the master's values (Cleanliness, Order) have not been forsaken by her. 'One of the earliest' enquiries she asks Fanny is 'How did her sister Bertram manage about her servants? Was she as much plagued as herself to get tolerant servants' (385). With no intention of producing any self-responsible signifiers, her speeches feature an angry longing for 'someone' to help her, and a lamentation at her state of lack. Austen dramatizes Mrs Price's language in the form of an incessant torrent of complaints, laments, and protests to foreground the painful gap of being: her failure and her longing, her desire and her inability to adhere to her ideal (money, comforts). In the novel, Mrs Price's words are characterized by shouts, and often 'in a complaining voice' (386) to voice the gap between her hopes and her lack. Her words are like helpless soliloquies talking to herself, or to her memory instead of talking to others, or solving her problems: 'now, how can you be so cross?...I wish you would not be so quarrelsome. Poor little Betsey; how cross Susan is to you....Poor Mary [the dead daughter] little thought it would be such a bone of contention when she gave me to keep only two hours before she died. Poor little soul!' (387). With a self-crippling alternate reliance and blame on people around her, failure is explained on the grounds of her children and her maids ('her own two were the very worst' in Portsmouth 385). But it is significant that, while she has no love for girls, William is to become 'her pride' (389). He represents the hope of mastery, the quest for class identity to her. However, at present, there is 'no hope of' things being 'settled' (385). And there can only be self-division and discontent.

In the story, Austen takes pains to negate the Price household and tell us that the entire family is discontented and dysfunctional. Young children fight each other, Betsy and Susan quarrel over a knife, Tom, Charles and Sam chase each other up and down the stairs. Mr Price calls for 'his rum and water', and Rebecca is 'never where

she ought to be' (387). Any small accident can make the whole family start talking at once, defending themselves (382). As a result, many critics identify with Fanny's view and believe that the Prices stand for the idea of lawlessness or anarchy. Duckworth calls it a 'Hobbesian state of incivility'.²⁵ However, much against the wish of Austen, the novel actually reveals to us that the Price family, though disorganized, is not without merits or laws. In terms of structure, the Prices may not adhere to the master's strict notion of Strong Order (characterized by Sir Thomas's authoritarian definition of discursive and status hierarchy at home or abroad). However, they do have their temporary, precarious, negotiable version of weak-order (i.e. a more diffused, less restrictive power structure). The Price family is not harmonious, but neither does it have a totalitarian structure like the Bertrams—for there is no dominant power in the center to create (bad) values. They are not like the Crawfords—for they are not educated or witty enough to turn values upside down. Mrs Price's biased arbitration on the question of the knife's ownership involves partiality; but in the process, it also involves Betsy and Susan's assertion of their views and Mrs Price's general acknowledgement of Susan's state as the legitimate owner. And with the absence of a formidable, tyrannical power center, every day is a day for appeal, a new opportunity to allow the victimized Susan to fight against injustice (her mother's letting Betsy have the knife). In opposition to lawlessness, this weak-order manifests a healthy freedom of speech, and a good chance of struggling against bad decisions. Fanny cannot voice her unhappiness among the Bertrams (e.g. the absence of a fire in her room), but Rebecca—the maidservant—can always speak up and freely justify herself among the Prices. '[T]here was a squabble between Sam and Rebecca about the manner of carrying up [Fanny's] trunk' (379). With a multiple power center, everybody is for his or her rights, with a less oppressive, hierarchical regard (but not a non-regard) for the big Law in the master discourse. Though it may be true that 'nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke' (392), the power structure of the Prices represents a more egalitarian form of governance, with a stronger tolerance to difference, dissent/resistance.

²⁵ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 77.

In terms of moral development, *Mansfield Park* tells us that the Prices are actually no better—and no worse—than the Bertrams: the young people are equally pleasure seeking; their differences lie in activities but not in nature (i.e. chasing up and down the stairs, two sisters' fight over a knife versus Tom's love of racing, the sisters' competition for Henry). Both families go to church, but religion seems to have no influence on their behavior. Quarrels appear only in different styles: while the Prices have loud arguments, the Bertrams have cold disagreements (Tom vs Edmund on acting, Julia vs Maria on Henry). In addition, the spirit of favoritism and disobedience exist equally well in the two families: Sir Thomas entrusts everything to Edmund during his absence, Mrs Price puts all her hopes on William. The young Prices never obey their mother, and the young Bertrams never pay attention to the words of Lady Bertram or Aunt Norris. If the Prices are portrayed by Austen as hopeless, their problem mirrors the sad reality that a little confusion may be good, but too much confusion can lead to paralysis. However, *Mansfield Park* also tells us that, without the luxury of confusion (characterized by the totalizing master in the Bertram household), oligarchic tyranny can easily take place.

If we are to distrust the Prices, it is because—behind the politics of resistance and subversive freedom—these people actually speak the same language of flattery in handling power and wealth. Mr Price 'swore and he drank' (389), but in the face of Mr Crawford, Mr Price is 'a very different man, a very different Mr Price in his behavior to this most highly-respected stranger, from what he was in his family at home' (402). His manners are 'passable', they are 'grateful, animated, manly', like 'an attached father, and a sensible man' (ibid). While this change relieves Fanny of any fear of immediate embarrassment, this incident can only persuade readers that 'plebian resistance' may not be as radical as it seems. The intransigent plebians, once transferred to a higher position, will eagerly delete any trace of inferiority by docilely copying the language and behavior around them. In the end, they will pledge solidarity with old, totalitarian values for it is their ultimate wish to relinquish lack for 'security and stability, the search of meaninglessness for a meaning or identity'.²⁶ Readers are alerted to distrust the Prices, for they are conformers instead of reformers.

²⁶ Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 67.

Austen shows us that if the plebians rise to occupy the master status, their value-judgement will try to imitate the discursive ideal of Justice. But without having first acquired any benevolent consciousness of the established class, they will act in total conformity with the moral codes, and the effect can be terrifying. After knowing the scandal of Maria and Mr Crawford, Mr Price comments that he would not be like Sir Thomas, as Sir Thomas 'may be too much of the courtier and fine gentleman to like his daughter for less'. But *if* he were Sir Thomas, and Maria were his daughter, he would 'give her the rope's end as long as [he] could stand over her. A little flogging for man and woman too, would be the best way of preventing such things' (440). In the novel, Austen foregrounds how a gentleman—Sir Thomas, a kind father—would not abandon his daughter, though his sense of justice would not allow him to receive her in the house, to 'restore what could never be restored' or seem to give 'his sanction to vice' (465). Sir Thomas is aggrieved by what happened; however, no statement like Mr Price's has been made. Mr Price's relinquishment of base language (swearing) for 'grand' justice bespeaks the plebians' eager desire to rise to the upper class, and incorporate a 'universal judgement' to enrich their speaking position. With a suddenly strict definition of 'Good' and 'Bad', this judgement allows no value-confusion, but it encourages a value-system that tolerates no leniency, no change. This moral vigor can only mirror a full submission to the existing (ideological) discursive ideal. And strict punishment to any offenders can only deny the world of any hopes of liberal reforms.

* * *

Mansfield Park is a watershed for Austen in highlighting her preference for the 'language of the servant'. In the past, Austen always elevates 'useful' characters like Colonel Brandon, Elinor Dashwood, Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. But after *Mansfield Park*, Austen has finally established her love of the serving spirit. Mr Knightley and Anne Elliot are characterized less by their masterly status, and more by their compassion in serving others. In this story, the triumph of Fanny's servanthood becomes the main plot, to be sidelined by Edmund's struggle to be a true servant of the Church. Fanny resists the shelter offered by Henry, and Edmund conquers his desire for worldliness and beauty (symbolized by Mary Crawford). This servant subjectivity is *not*, as many critics suggest, gained by passivity or 'doing nothing'.

On the contrary, it marks a vigorous, analytical, struggling consciousness in its direct confrontation with lack, allowing the subject to feel its subjection, 'alienation and desire' and to separate 'from the given master signifiers' and produce 'its own new master signifiers'.²⁷ The language of the servant is closely related to the master's values (order, hierarchy); however, it does not endorse the master's psychological and social tyranny exercised through language. The servant begins by distancing itself from the master's discourse (which assigns the servant to a painful state of non-being). With the servant's on-going conflict with its assigned symbolic status, it comes to feel a rising, unsymbolizable consciousness which is 'excentric or incommensurable with (i.e., forbidden by) this assumed identity'.²⁸ Then a critical moment comes: a) the servant fails to establish its own language if it relapses to a complete identification with its lowliness or its assigned (humble) position; and b) it fails even more if it rebels against and denounces its own humble discursive identity and turns to identify with the master's enunciating position. The result is that the servant forgets its own state of being and repeats the master's language, thereby paradoxically justifying the master's superiority, its oppression of itself. This position can only heighten the cycle of discursive and psychological tyranny and snobbery (e.g. some servants specialize in playing the master's game and looking down their nose at people). *If* the servant can successfully establish its own language, it will allow changes to take place by bringing into light its past suffering, its unsymbolizable, excluded portion of being (*a*), and empathizing with those people that are being suppressed by the master. In turn, the servant can build a less totalizing, less oppressive, more processual subjectivity to refute the tyrannical, rigid symbolic identity designated by the masters. It has attained a genuine change of subject-position for it can encounter, acknowledge, and come to identify with its once-excluded pain and suffering (*a*), and turn it into a positive force to remap and transform the world.

In *Mansfield Park*, we can differentiate between an involuntary servanthood and a voluntary servanthood. The opening of the novel shows how a girl can become an involuntary servant through the master's suppression. Fanny's personality before her

²⁷ Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 68.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 69.

arrival at Mansfield Park is a *different* one: she is 'timid and shy' (12), but with a healthy and able identity. She is the 'play-fellow, instructress, and the nurse' (14) to her brothers and sisters. But Mansfield Park reduces her to ignorance, shame, and silence. Thus a new disposition is formed: she becomes submissive to mortification, and 'she thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by [anything]' (20). She is small before her entrance into Mansfield Park, but she becomes frail after her (mis)placement in a rich family. In other words, Sir Thomas' 'kindly meant' positioning of Fanny has destroyed her health.²⁹ In the story, the master's language exercises an 'euphemized violence' to strategically force a person into an inferior subject-position. This violence is enacted through the 'double education' of Fanny Price. Austen tells us that Fanny receives a 'formal education' from the governess. But the inferiority of the poor girl is 'certified' by 'objective' assessment, thereby legitimizing the Bertrams' superiority and concealing the power relations which are the basis of their unequal achievement. While a formal education gives Fanny access to knowledge and poetic expressions, and makes Fanny a knowledgeable 'apt scholar' (as Edmund calls her 139), an informal education, together with its soft violence, has totally robbed the girl of her tongue. Through a differential distribution of space and privileges (e.g. horse-riding, ball-going, carriage-arrangement, distribution of toys and clothes etc), the informal education conveys a strong message to suppress any hope of equality. As a result, Fanny represents how the inferior subject's intellectual achievement is entirely *not counted*, and she never speaks up in front of the Mansfield masters. Her 'habitual dread' (176) best captures the oppressive effect on the servant's emotions. It is an involuntary, painful process, but Fanny represents how a servant has little choice. In the novel, the servant is constantly terrorized by threats and accusations, and the result is that servility becomes an automated response to avoid further suffering: whoever calls Fanny, 'Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand, for the habit of employing her in that way was not yet overcome, in spite of all that Edmund could do' 145). The

²⁹ John Wiltshire has studied the relationship between bodily health and Fanny's condition of existence. He challenges the assertion of Moler that says 'Fanny Price is physically frail...but she is emotionally sound'. John Wiltshire's chapter on Mansfield Park reveals that she is physically frail because she is emotionally disturbed. Her health improves as she rises to power (see *Jane Austen and the Body* 62-110).

servant is moulded to think lowly of herself, and to adjust her identity as assigned by the master.

To Hegel, the master's desire to empty the servant's subjectivity and replace it with a lowly identity dialectically helps liberate the servant from a tyrannical adherence to the master's words, therefore allowing the birth of a new selfhood. And he theorizes that labor is the key to enable the rise of the slave-servant. *Mansfield Park* shows us that hardship and labor make Fanny feel her usefulness. However, unlike Hegel's optimistic estimation, it does not produce any positive effect. 'Kept back as she was by everybody else' (22), Fanny does not gain any rise or any sense of self-worth from her work. The only important result is that labor teaches the servant the necessity of alienating identification—to yield to the master's orders and alienate herself from it at the same time. Her tears, her headaches (as a result of her work) certainly bespeak a new, unsymbolizable body language in response to the oppressive commands of Aunt Norris. But the body cannot ground any resistant consciousness—for the servant has to learn to deny her body language to heed the order of the masters. Fanny has to put up with the sun, or feelings like humiliations to do any job assigned to her. The struggle between the master and the body's language helps reconstitute the basis of the servant's paradoxical identification and alienation from both words and body. If this process can give birth to any identity, it is the birth of a distorted self-negating status that characterizes Fanny's servant subjectivity. Fanny does not trust and dares not distrust language: she listens to Aunt Norris' command that she must be 'the last', she feels the pain and disidentifies with those words, but Fanny listens to herself saying 'Yes, ma'am, I should not think of anything else' (221). The servant cannot suppress her body language, but neither can she express the resistant message of her body. In the novel, Fanny often fails to control her tears, but her tears cannot convey to others her intended protest, her anger, her frustrations. It becomes a helpless flood of unsymbolizable emotions, thereby giving the master more chances to exercise its discursive privileges and make more oppressive, eloquent interpretations of her tears. Her headache results in Aunt Norris' conclusion that it is Fanny's fault—'cutting the roses, and dawdling about in the flower-garden, that did the mischief' (73). And her tears at Sir Thomas's reproof (for not choosing Henry) can only make Sir Thomas feel that she is irrational

and she merely feels sorry for her decision. She is a 'self-willed, obstinate, selfish and ungrateful' girl who 'will probably have reason to be long sorry for this day's transactions' (319, 320).

Many people dislike Fanny because she has a distorted, unloveable, prudish subjectivity. While it is true that Fanny is *not* a lovely subject with her timid gestures and fears, Austen has deliberately dramatized her to be so in order to foreground the convoluted psychology of the servant. With abuse and sufferings in its past, it is natural for a servant to have a split view of everything, even to the point of self-excenterizing cancellation, i.e. to obey and critique the masters, to hide, cherish, disidentify with, *and* negate her own voice and emotions (for tears and her hopeless love for Edmund can only give her sufferings). On the surface, Fanny represents how a servant always displays an apparently 'vacuous' subjectivity just to be on the safe side (or else she would be punished). Eventually, critics have two extreme views on critiquing Fanny. Many critics condemn her particularity to question her moral character (for she fails to live up to the standard of the 'angelic character').³⁰ Another extreme is to attack Fanny for her 'lack' of particularity and for her total conformity to moral codes. She is like a parrot that speaks the correct language for the sake of 'self-defense' and 'self-aggrandizing impulse'.³¹ These critics neglect the fact that Austen has presented to us a servant with a very problematic, *struggling* consciousness—if Fanny tries to be an angel, Fanny's envy would tell her that she is not. In the novel, Fanny always thinks too lowly of herself to make any 'self-aggrandizing' attempts. If she speaks a correct language, it is actually an ironic inheritance of the master's legacy—for it has been forced on her and expected by Aunt Norris and Sir Bertram.

To explain these points clearly, the novel has not portrayed Fanny as an 'angelic character', as expected and critiqued by the critics. If Edmund gives his attention to

³⁰ For example, Nardin says, 'Readers who have disliked Fanny are indeed right in thinking that she is timid, both self-deprecating and quick to resent slights, inclined to be hard on others, yet very regardful of how she appears to them. Fanny's resentment and jealousy lead her to be consistently unfair to the kindly and affectionate, if ill principled, Mary Crawford and her timid care for the way she looks to others (*Those Elegant Decorums* 107).

³¹ See Fleishman 45. Duckworth quotes some critics' complaints: Fanny is too universal, 'bookish and poetically mediated', hence, her morality is illusory. Fanny 'speaks, as Kenneth Moler has convincingly demonstrated, in the tones and vocabulary of Hannah More' (Duckworth *The Improvement of the Estate* 75). However, he disagrees with these critics' strategic undermining of Fanny's moral character. He believes Fanny's moral strength is greater than her weakness.

Mary Crawford, Fanny would feel bad for she 'had been feeling neglected, and been struggling against discontent and envy for some days past' (74). But Fanny represents how a servant—with a lack of resources and discursive control, and being constitutionally moulded by the master's expectation that she should be docilely good—always faults or suppresses herself instead of challenging the master's decisions. Fanny would try hard to guard herself from negative feelings like hatred (of Mrs Norris or Sir Thomas), or class envy (of the Bertrams or the Crawfords). Her jealousy is constantly under good control. For example, Fanny sometimes has 'feelings so near akin to envy', but she 'hate[s] herself for having them' (413). In the midst of her personal interest and dislike of Mary Crawford, Fanny is a fair-minded servant. On Mary's problem, Fanny 'gently' puts it down as 'the effect of education' (269).

Fanny could have said a great deal, but it was safer to say nothing, and... Miss Crawford's kind opinions of herself deserved at least a grateful forbearance, and she began to talk of something else. (199)

In turn, she refuses to give advice on several occasions on the grounds of a conflict of interests: 'I am not qualified for an adviser. Do not ask advice of *me*. I am not competent' (269). 'She believed herself to feel too much of [jealousy] in the aggregate for honesty or safety in [giving criticism to Edmund and Mary's rehearsal]' (170).

In the meantime, the combined result of education and threats has reduced the servant to rely more docilely on the master signifiers or rules than on people. For example, the young Bertrams can feel secure enough to discard their propriety for a while, but Fanny dares not speak in favor of acting. The novel ironically reveals to us that this servile 'tendency to priggishness' (to use Harding's words) *is and is not Fanny's own voice*. Given Sir Thomas's gravity and Aunt Norris' insistence on 'Hierarchy', it can only convince the servant that masters must be dignified creatures. While the young masters can abandon their identity to have fun for a while, Fanny (for fear of punishment) dares not deviate from the prescribed codes of conduct. Austen draws us to notice the contrastive, *true* voice of a servant: 'For [Fanny's] own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but every thing of higher consequence was against it' (131). In short, the 'prudent' speech is endorsed by Fanny, but it does not

come from her real feelings, but from the 'higher consequence', or the legacy of the masters. And we can see that critics have wronged Austen by attributing to Fanny the manufacture of priggish speeches. If Fanny is a 'parrot' that speaks only the 'correct language', it is because of the master's totalitarian indoctrination. Fanny talks of her refusal, but she watches the rehearsal with genuine excitement. And it is a remarkable fact that, in this self-excenterizing gap between language and desire, Austen directs us to notice how the servant's adherence to the noble-minded discourse (Honor, Integrity) has led her to dialectically overcome her fear of the master. In the novel, all the masters have degenerated in adopting the language of flattery to deal with wealth and status; Fanny—the servant—is the only one who dares to say 'no' (with no regret) to any love of wealth, status and connection (symbolized by Henry Crawford).

The story reveals to us that the servant's genuine voice remains silent and suppressed. Fanny Price is a quiet subject who has few words: 'Fanny, not liking to complain, found it easiest to make no answer (268). In contrast to the master's witty speeches, the servant is safe in her silence.³² Austen's narrative not only leads us to sympathize with Fanny Price's silence, but also allows readers to see that the servant, no matter how repressed she is, can always retain what Lacan calls 'surplus' identity. Though the master (e.g. Mrs Norris) has exhausted all language to fixate the servant's discursive lowliness, Austen's story shows us that it must be a failing project, for the servant can always feel differently. To use the words of Evans, surplus identity can exist because language can never pinpoint the real 'me', and 'there is some surplus that can escape the master's representation'.³³ However, while this surplus identity enables the servant to escape the tyranny of the master discourse, it is not enabling enough to fight against the master (for no one can put the asymbolic surplus into words). And discursively, the servant always endorses and follows the master discourse. And that is the reason Fanny is 'graver than other people'. She is more 'discreet' (197). But the reader knows that Fanny has a different, unsayable identity embedded within her discursive compliance. Hence one

³² Mudrick is not fair in comparing Mary and Fanny's verbal performance. He praises Mary for her 'powerful interest in her human environment' (*Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* 90), he overlooks the fact that Fanny's involvement with human beings can only give her pain.

³³ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* 106.

can easily problematize the belief that Fanny has a cold ‘unquestioning’ obedience. She thinks and knows she has no right to be jealous: ‘she had not words strong enough to satisfy her own humility. To think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity’ (264). However, Fanny *is* jealous. This surplus identity gives her the power to criticize the master, but it also takes away her discursive ability to articulate her thoughts. For example, she thinks Miss Crawford and her friends ‘have been corrupting one another’ for years (424). Fanny judges Henry Crawford as a selfish womanizer, Maria and Julia will forgo sisterly love for men. But Fanny *cannot* articulate her thoughts. It is in this sense that I try to explain all servants’ (or the lower class’s) nervous fearfulness in front of the masters, or in their moment of self-justification. When it comes to language (a zone very much dominated by the privileged subjects), the servant feels *oppressed* if she has to speak up, and she cannot voice her belief even though Sir Thomas has distinctly told her to do so. The servant has internalized the built-in lowliness/discursive identity assigned to her. The servant accepts but distrusts the oppressive (master’s) language for she feels it can only work against her. In turn, the servant refuses to communicate and is fearful of ‘doing wrong’, ‘saying too much’, ‘overacting the caution which she had been fancying necessary’ (354): Fanny’s ‘heart sunk under the appalling prospect of discussion, explanation and probably non-conviction...Her ill-opinion of [Henry] was founded chiefly on observations’ (317). As a result, Fanny fails to justify herself and can only say sorry ‘inarticulately through her tears’. However, as the surplus, unsayable identity is beyond the reach of the master’s governance, Fanny’s resistant identity remains intact in spite of her verbal timidity.

Austen indicates that hope lies in the incorporation and change of this unsayable suffering identity (*a*) in the construction of a new language. This new language foregrounds the subject’s previous alienation and desire, and can produce less restricted, exclusive master signifiers, that is, ‘ideals and values less inimical to its fundamental fantasy and the desire embodied by that fantasy’.³⁴ Fanny’s return from Portsmouth represents such a change. Instead of repeating the master’s Hierarchy, Fanny’s new life involves a change of subject-position without abandoning the memory of her suffering. She endorses men (like Edmund) who seek a voluntary

³⁴ Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* 68.

servanthood: 'To be the friend of the poor and oppressed! Nothing could be more grateful to her!' (404). Meanwhile, Edmund also changes. Edmund confronts the gap between his desire for Mary Crawford and moral principles, with pain dominating his mind. His new subject-position is characterized by a whole-hearted acceptance of his moral choice, thereby leaving his anguish behind. With Edmund's true desire to serve, and Fanny's excellent usefulness, Austen's arrangement of the end is very much in line with the Hegelian vision described by Plamenatz,

The future is with the slave. It is his destiny to create the community in which everyone accords recognition to everyone else, the community in which spirit attains its end and satisfaction.³⁵

The couple support new master signifiers like 'hardship, compassion, discipline'. However, it is on Sir Thomas that Austen intends to explicate the effect of this new subject-position. Sir Thomas is led to have a new perspective on education. He aligns accomplishments with the language of flattery. He exposes how his ideological fantasy (to be rich) is the cause of his daughter's failed education. In the end, Sir Thomas's change signifies his approval of social mobility: he turns to value the nonmanifest, suppressed agents, or value factors like 'early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure' (473). Without labor, 'active principle', 'the sense of duty' or the 'daily practice' of their religion, Sir Thomas sees that the love of masterly elegance and accomplishment can only lead to pride and downfall: 'To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments, the authorized object of their youth, could have no useful influence...no moral effect on the mind' (463). Disillusioned, the master is capable of producing new signifiers out of his own suffering: Sir Thomas sees that young people should not embrace the triumph of elegant gentility, they should learn 'the sterling good of principle of temper' (471), 'the necessity of self-denial and humility' (463). This new reading leads to the master's abandoning of his dislike of cross-class marriage, or his prejudice against the 'vulgar' lower class. At the end, it prompts him to endorse the marriage of Fanny and Edmund, and praise William Price. 'Sick of ambition and mercenary connections' (471), 'Fanny is indeed the daughter that he wanted' (472).

³⁵ Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, 155.

And from this, the end of *Mansfield Park* symbolizes the emergence of social change.

It is important to note that Austen has arranged a mutual enlightenment in *Mansfield Park*. For the first time in her novels, a genuine reconciliation takes place between the old and the young generations in order to build a progressive community. Sir Thomas's change implies an enlightened attitude towards class mobility. He supports the couple at Thornton Lacey 'with every kind attention to [their] comfort' (472). In turn, the end of absolute mastery is symbolized by Sir Thomas's emotional dependence on the servants. He feels 'the object of almost every day was to see [Fanny] there, or to get her away from [Thornton Lacey]' (ibid). Meanwhile, Austen's view on the value of the servant's 'hardship and discipline' is akin to Hegel's idea of an enlightened education: 'the subjugation of...egotism forms the *beginning* of true human freedom. This quaking of the single, isolated will, the feeling of the worthlessness of egotism, the habit of obedience, is a necessary moment in the education (*Bildung*) of all men' (Ency §435). Austen's story concludes that the servant's 'consciousness of being born to struggle and endure' (473) can only bring positive results.

Austen foresees that the future will belong to the servants, but social change will happen only on the condition that, one day, they can relinquish their servant-status and rise to form a new, 'self-made' class of their own by forming an 'enlightened' alliance with the established subjects. It is no longer a coercive, contractual alliance imposed on the poor subjects by the rich under the strategic name of 'gratitude', but an alliance that promotes the 'true merit' of the serving spirit, and can reform the judgment of established subjects. Austen believes that it will bring progress to *all* in society: Susan is 'useful', Fanny is 'excellent', 'in William's continued good conduct, and rising fame, and in the general well-doing and success of the other members of the family, all assisting to advance each other' (473). In this process, the established class (symbolized by Sir Thomas) plays a vital part in funding social change and is benefited by its fruits. Tom has learnt to imitate the serving spirit. He becomes 'what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself' (462). Sir Thomas is repeatedly happy to 'rejoice in what he had done for them all' (473).

In the midst of these joyful celebrations, Austen has conveyed to us the idea of an enlightened ‘reconciliatory tension’. These tensions are shown in the varying gradations of renewal: though the bond between Sir Thomas and the couple is real, Edmund and Fanny symbolically remain at the margin of the big house. Their mutual dependence and appreciation cannot hide the ideological gap between the two houses. Mansfield Park represents the promotion of certain discursive, religious practices about social justice, its living being seven hundred pounds a year. In the story, Sir Thomas changes his position and demolishes one of his fantasies (‘ambition’) by taking his suffering into account. However, Sir Thomas’s income, which comes partially from Antigua, indicates that the big house has failed to change the basis of its foundation—which is constructed on injustice and other people’s suffering. If a direct confrontation with the excluded elements (pain, happiness, or the marginalized people) can lead to social change, Sir Thomas’ avoidance of examining the suffering of other people can only mean a partial rejuvenation of values. While the big house shows *some* signs of progress in its transformation of values, its foundation is unjust and its reputation is irreparably tarnished—as symbolized by the ruined Maria.

Meanwhile, Austen reveals to her readers another form of tension. Austen writes that the rich can admire or reconcile with people from humbler origins because of their fortitude and zeal. The rich note that ‘hardship and discipline’, and self-renunciation help produce fine young people. However, we must notice that not all servants are enlightened creatures like Fanny or Edmund. And hardship or discipline-in-itself does not mean the promotion of a less tyrannical subject-position (c.p. the disciplined spirit of Nazi soldiers). The servant’s moral striving for heroic ideals can be an unenlightened project to court power and wealth. In the ‘noble’ language of discipline, we can often detect the same language of flattery at work in the serving spirit. With William’s zeal for work, his main objective is to ‘praise the Thrush, conjecture how she would be employed’ and entertain ‘speculations upon prize money’ (375). William’s benefactor—Henry Crawford—is valued by him as the ‘first of human characters’ (375), so he laments that Fanny’s feelings should be so ‘cold’ towards him. He is eager to show (off) the uniform of 2nd lieutenant of H.M.S. Thrush ‘in all his glory’, and is ‘not very merciful to the first lieutenant’

(375). In his self-importance, Austen's story gives us a hint that the call of ideology can easily fade the voice of love. William forgets Fanny immediately. 'A stare or two at Fanny...was all the voluntary notice which this brother bestowed' to her while he is 'entirely engaged in detailing further particulars of the Thrush's going out of the harbor' (377). Though we can see that the young generation has a less oppressive style in directing others, it is by no means upholding a fundamentally different position. William has 'good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and cheerfulness—every thing that could deserve or promise well'; however, at work, his energy is spent on committing himself to the pursuit of ideological fantasies of wealth and national glory. Before twenty, he has been to the Mediterranean, the West Indies, then the Mediterranean again, and exposed to the dangers of sea and war (236). In his full awareness of a 'noble-minded consciousness', 'heroism of service' (PS 559), William represents how the young serving spirit can, in the height of its fantasmal pursuit of glory, remain dangerously and absolutely blind. He can remain deluded about (and hence reconciled with) the base consciousness of his deeds/colonial conquests, exact 'self-respect and...respect from others' while he kills the weak and enjoys personal gains in these affairs. With William's unenlightened strivings (his exploits, his adventures, his participation in wars, and his direction of the Thrush), his language mirrors how, under the guise of 'law and command', he can hide, define and unite any particular interests in universal terms. Once the subject enjoys 'a titanic self-consciousness', Hegel tells us that the subject will revert to a blatant mingling of noble and ignoble consciousness: the onset of nihilism and confusion of values is about to begin anew.

Chapter 6: The Question of Duplicity in *Emma*

Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have, is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without sense, than misapply it as you do (64).

Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken. (431)

After *Mansfield Park*, Austen visualizes a world in which two serving subjects become loving sovereigns. These subjects have learnt to confront the trauma of the poor and the oppressed (*a*). They take into account the pain of people in constructing their new subject-positions, and become caring servant-sovereigns. In *Emma*, Austen foregrounds two major problems with this progressive community. First, female sovereignty differs essentially from a man's straightforward, legitimate governance. Second, desire will lead to a rising tension between the self and the Other, the self and the law. In the story, although the subject voices a commitment to serving others, its action is inevitably tied to its specific interests. Hegel calls this the stage of 'moral duplicity'. The subject may be a less tyrannical ruler, but it still speaks a(n unconsciously duplicitious) language to justify its likes and dislikes. In *Emma*, the subject comes to learn of its inconsistency in dramatic ways. In a love game that involves a conflict of interests, the subject makes a choice after seeing the incompatible gap between its unconscious desire and its desire for independence, its self-love and the love for the poor.

By aligning *Emma* with the ideal of a disciplined, caring sovereign (as implied in the ending of *Mansfield Park*), I intend to refute the mainstream criticism of Emma Woodhouse as an aggressive or narcissistic character. For example, Howard Babb says, 'Emma's aggressiveness seems to have been nourished by her upbringing'.¹ Susan Morgan says, 'Like the emperor of Lilliput, Emma has a dominion which stretches to the very extremities of the globe and includes all Highbury'.² T.Vasudeva Reddy considers Emma's capacity for introspection to be what saves her from 'a narcissistic entrapment of herself'.³ In contrast to these views, I shall argue

¹ Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* 177.

² Morgan, *In the Meantime* 27.

³ Reddy, *Jane Austen. The Dialectics of Self Actualization in Her Novels* 62.

that Austen emphatically presents Emma Woodhouse and George Knightley as two enlightened sovereigns whose subjectivity is characterized by a serving spirit committed to the improvement of their respective dominions. She foregrounds how these two subjects go out of their ways to serve the poor and those who are in need. If *Mansfield Park* problematizes the patriarch's robust, self-serving 'benevolent' dominance, *Emma* exposes the patriarch's altruistic-autocratic imposition on Others and hopes it will suffer a further decline. Austen symbolically replaces Sir Thomas's anguish with Mr Woodhouse's destroyed, feeble health. Gone is the gravity, the sound judgement and courage of the patriarch: Mr Woodhouse possesses a 'friendliness of...heart' and an 'amiable temper', but his pitiable 'spirits required support'. He 'was a nervous man, easily depressed' (7). If Sir Thomas can invade others, Mr Woodhouse, upon learning of the gipsies' attack on Harriet, sits trembling in his seat (336). The only unchanged factor is that, in the name of altruism, the patriarch blindly imposes his ideas on others and demands compliance. For example, Mr Woodhouse offers people a *small* boiled egg, a very *little* bit of apple tart, *half* a glass of wine (25).

Austen intends that real power should fall into the hands of a young, moral generation. At the beginning of the novel, Emma is already a mature, moral subject who uses her judicial power to serve people, and look after the welfare of her father and her guests. 'Directed chiefly by her own' judgement (5), Emma does not repeat the 'imaginary' altruism of the old regime. Instead, she perceives and arbitrates between the genuine needs of the Other and the 'benevolent' but softly tyrannical claims of her father ('suppose we all have a little gruel' 100). Emma 'allowed her father to talk—but supplied her visitors in a much more satisfactory style' (25). Unlike Sir Thomas's notion of help (which involves financial aid, but no personal participation or sacrifice in the process), Emma's action (as well as Knightley's) denotes a moral agent's direct involvement and the placing of others' welfare over her own. Emma is 'delighted to see her father look comfortable', even though she dislikes 'the quiet prosings of three such women', and feels that 'every evening so spent' can only bring fearful anticipation (22). Though Mr Woodhouse's claim seems an exaggerated one in the first place ('Emma never thinks of herself, if she can do good to others' 13), it is proven to have some truth. On the surface, Emma is

always 'first': she thinks she 'deserves[s] the best treatment, because [she] never put[s] up with any other' (474). But the reality is that, being the first, this subject is always eager to enact the concept of a servant-sovereign to do good to the other. While the narcissistic subject loves no one but its (imaginarily perfect) self, Emma is capable of placing serious principles and people above herself. The moment Emma approaches the poor people in the cottage, 'all idle topics were suppressed. Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse' (111). Emma's forgetfulness of herself is particularly strong once she knows she has erred: Emma 'would not be ashamed of the appearance of the penitence, so justly and truly hers' (377-8). She can only think of Jane's need by extending to her various attempts at compensatory gestures (notes, visits, carriage, arrow-root). 'With the real good-will of a mind delighted with its own ideas' (24), 'her intentions were good' (391).

In opposition to the common belief that ladies are unfit for government⁴, Austen has portrayed a woman as the sovereign of Highbury. Emma is well educated, and her actions often ignore her contingent inclination and opinion. Instead, Emma represents how a woman can unite her feelings with the demands of duty. Hence, Trilling notes that Emma Woodhouse is one of the rare heroines with a moral life of her own.⁵ In the novel, this new morality is characterized not by a stoic outlook (Elinor Dashwood style) in which the unhappy subject 'stands in a relation of stark indifference' to its duty (PS 568). On the contrary, it 'has the task of harmonizing morality with happiness'. Though Hegel writes this for men, such moral subjectivity is visualized by Austen as belonging to an intelligent woman: 'This is then henceforth a master and ruler..., who brings about the harmony of morality and happiness', and at the same time performs duties 'in their multiplicity' (PS §606, 370). In other words, Emma Woodhouse is capable of *reconciling (personal) happiness amidst her (impersonal) moral deliberation*. Austen often uses free indirect discourse to make readers perceive that there are always gaps between her

⁴ Hegel compares women to 'plants', and believes they are unfit for the public sphere. 'Women may well be educated, but they are not made for the higher sciences...Women may have insights..., but they do not possess the ideal...their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion' (PR §166, 206).

feelings and deeds; however, these gaps are immediately bridged by her finding a new, genuine pleasure in her moral action. Emma knows that her father is ‘no companion to her’ (7), but she ‘dearly loved her father’ and would gladly put his interest in the first place. In the story, Emma is happy to talk to people she likes and dislikes. Austen’s free indirect discourse informs us that Emma senses that Mrs Elton is ‘self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant, and ill-bred’, but Emma enjoys talking with good grace to others about Mrs Elton being ‘very pleasant and very elegantly dressed’ (281). Emma is ‘quick in feeling the little injuries [John Knightley has done] to Isabella, which Isabella never felt herself’ (93). She critiques his lack of ‘respectful forbearance towards her father’ (ibid) and dislikes John’s opinion of Mr Weston’s sociable habits. But Emma is happy to ‘keep the peace if possible’, she turns to appreciate ‘the something honorable and valuable in the strong domestic habits’ of his brother. She evaluates his claims, and finds ‘it had a high claim to forbearance’ (97). This task of harmonizing morality with happiness is also noted by Jane Nardin:

Emma derives a good deal of ‘comfort’ from ‘appearing very polite while feeling very cross’ (119). Emma is always pleased with herself for her polite forbearance toward the many people who annoy her repeatedly, because this forbearance places her, she feels, in a position of superiority: *they* may be rude, but *she* is invariably civil. The fact that she is always ‘feeling very cross’ (119) towards the recipients of this elegant courtesy, that her ‘civilities’ are often paid to ‘a person she did not like’ (166), adds to, rather than detracts from, the value of her politeness in Emma’s own eyes.⁶

Though a woman can be as competent as a man, *Emma* draws us to notice that a woman—the daughter of a patriarch—enjoys a different form of governing power from men, as shown in the two languages spoken by Emma and Mr Knightley. Mr Knightley is the owner of Donwell Abbey. Austen symbolically suggests that his ‘knightly’ regime is characterized by a serving spirit that is useful to others, and defends honesty and integrity. Though never tyrannical, Mr Knightley’s power is openly recognized. He consults William Larkins, but he is a man who has the final authority in his dominions. His manner is described by Emma to be ‘downright, decided, commanding’ (34). Mixing authority and servanthood, tactful negotiation

⁵ Trilling “Emma and the Legend of Jane Austen” in *Emma. A Casebook*. Ed. David Lodge, 154.

and open decisiveness, Austen intends that Mr Knightley should speak a '*simple language*'—a highly accessible, sincere, friendly, laconic language—as a way to renew gentry discourse. This language reduces the effect of class differences, and honors plain-dealing and open, negotiary communication for easy and democratic access in the plebian circle. Its linguistic simplicity breaks down (class, emotional) barriers, connects people of all social standings to forestall further decentering of the family, the community and the rural economical order. With Knightley's simple words and sincerity, even negative feelings (anger, dislike) fail to cause interpersonal or social divisions. Emma is not roused to hate Knightley because of his anger at her arrangement with Harriet's affairs, or his Box Hill exhortation. In the story, Knightley is never grave, his no-frills greeting ('John, how are you?') bespeaks a linguistic rejuvenation that (to Austen) gives hope for the renewal of the nation. She leads readers to admire the simple speech in which 'real attachment' shines through 'the true English style' of 'calmness' and 'indifference' (99). Austen postulates that this simple language as a consistent, actionistic language. Words may be few, but if required, this moral subject will do 'every thing for the good of the other' (100). Critics may find fault with Knightley's apparently simple but powerful enunciating position: for example, Roland Barthes says that Knightley's language enjoys a discursive surplus to mask his social and verbal hegemony.

Knightley sees the role of definer and theorizer of social and moral matters as his, and his alone, in Highbury, by reason of his sex, his wealth, his middle age, and the place that Donwell Abbey has bequeathed to him in the country scheme of things.⁷

While Roland Barthes equates Knightley's language with another master discourse, Knightley's language has a fundamentally different goal. Knightley may enjoy a definitive discursive advantage, but his discourse does not signify totality or authoritarianism. On the contrary, it helps construct an unprecedented subject-position—a servant-king—in which the subject descends to open up boundaries, democratize its domain, and heed the plebian values. Junkerman correctly points out the implications of Knightley's verbal and nonverbal message: 'literally, he shares his carriage with those in the community who are horseless', and he walks 'on an

⁶ Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums* 115.

⁷ Barthes, *S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 129-30.

equal footing with the people in Highbury...Knightley is actively engaged in all the day-to-day workings of the community. He stands in Austen's mind for the spirit of connection and attachment; he maintains a lively awareness of others' dependence on him and of his obligation to them'.⁸ Knightley has not gone far enough to support an open society or total democracy (as shown in Knightley's problematization of Harriet's background); however, this simple, service/action-oriented language can effectively downplay class privileges, enhance interaction and allow open communication to take place. And this can be the first step towards the democratization and improvement of any society.

In contrast to a man's simple speech, a woman is seldom encouraged to establish her authority using direct expressions or plain-dealing. From the very beginning of the story, Emma speaks a language that is constructed/confined by a paternal power structure and is actively engaged with paternal fantasies. In other words, it may not involve self-deception (for Emma knows what she is about), but it is a masquerading, *duplicitous language* from the outset. To explain this clearly, if Austen intends Emma to be an independent character, readers can also perceive that her power comes from her dependence on paternal authority, her father, against whom she never rebels. Emma represents how a daughter loves her father, but this love is mediated through a specific paternal fantasy in the domestic context ('papa's good girl') in order to enable her to inherit his kingdom, and enter into a position of legitimate authority. In this paternal fantasizing and distribution of roles (a 'lovely daughter', though the daughter may be a strong woman; a 'good father', though the father may be a bigoted man), the woman has internalized a fixed enunciating position. With innocent looks, soft voice, amicable tones, the daughter's discursive role is to enforce the paternal fantasy, i.e., to posit herself as a subordinated/lovely girl, to reinforce the father's value/goodness, to please and appease the father. However, the reality is that she actively and secretly manipulates him to do what she—a mature, moral subject—judges best for the good of the society, or for him. In other words, the female subject's 'natural' speech is a reaction to the paternal fantasy. She unconsciously works with this fantasy, but ultimately overcomes it (while using it as a frame) in order to establish her reign. Instead of a simple

⁸ Junkerman, *Containment and Subversion* 74-5.

language, Emma knows that a woman must mask her ideas and package them into some kind of acceptable (girlish) expressions, or enter into her father's illusions of hypochondria. With a careful ignoring and selection of signs, Emma can indirectly say what she believes to be right.

In this convoluted female sovereignty, while the subject is devoted to the betterment of the welfare of her beloved people, verbal truth, simplicity or openness is not her first concern. To Jane Fairfax, Emma might say, 'I love everything that is decided and open' (460). However, Emma's language is actually characterized by a duplicitous speech that denotes double-dealing and manipulation. In turn, her discourse sounds like a non-threatening, *non-authoritative*, *non-hegemonic*, 'natural', chatty, girlish talk: psychologically reassuring and compliant to male ears, but functional enough to express Emma's mature, independent thoughts and assert her leadership. In the story, Emma's expressions to her father are always innocently tactful: 'We shall be going to see [the Westons]...We shall always be meeting!' 'No, papa, nobody thought of your walking' (8). It is autocratically decisive but skillfully respectful: '[The poor horses] are to be put into Mr Weston's stable, papa. You know we have settled that already' (ibid). It is flattering and reassuring to male ears: 'Nobody thought of Hannah till you mentioned her'. 'That, was your doing, papa....James is so obliged to you!' (9). It involves an active attention to the patriarch's fantasy and an ignoring of it: the moment Mr Woodhouse says, 'poor Miss Taylor', Emma would correct him gently with 'Oh! Papa, we have missed seeing them but one entire day since they married' (94). Emma is always watchful of her father's conversation, and will interfere the moment she feels 'this to be an unsafe subject' (101). 'Come, come...I beg you not to talk of the sea' (ibid). Emma can be firm in bypassing Mr Woodhouse's irrational claims: Mr Woodhouse does not like any guest 'to share with him in Isabella's first day', however, Emma's reflective 'sense of right...had decided' to invite Mr Knightley (98).

To Knightley, Emma's language is considerably different. It is a language alternately masked behind the register of a clever woman and a playful girl. Emma uses rational arguments to state her defense of Harriet (her looks, her disposition, Knightley's bias to Mr Martin), but she ends with a 'To be sure!' cried she playfully. 'I know that is the feeling of you all...O! Harriet may pick and choose.' (64). To

Harriet, Emma's language employs even less exclamatory remarks, and adopts a stronger emphasis on open guidance/manipulative advice: 'I lay it down as a rule, Harriet, that if a woman *doubts* as to whether she should accept a man....If she can hesitate as to 'Yes', she ought to say 'No' directly' (52). While Austen leads us to see that Emma's intentions are just as good as Mr Knightley's, to protect and serve her 'subjects', a woman's enunciating position has confined her to adopt a(n unconsciously) duplicitous speech to deal with different people using different languages. In the novel, Austen reveals what Emma can be in a moment of emergency. Where there is no time for disguise, Emma shows how a woman's language can be as direct and simple as Knightley's. Snow suddenly comes at night, and Mr Woodhouse and Isabella are greatly upset.

While the others were variously urging and recommending, Mr Knightley and Emma settled it in a few brief sentences: thus—

'Your father will not be easy; why do you not go?'

'I am ready, if the others are.'

'Shall I ring the bell?'

'Yes, do.' (128)

As the duplicitous language never subverts the established paternal (class, gender) fantasies, this speech disarms paternal disapproval—even though a woman has become the leader of the society. Emma's language is valuable for anyone in a subordinate position; however, one must note that Emma's language is not dishonorable in terms of its ends. In the story, Frank Churchill is another subject who has mastered the art of a deceitful language. Hence Emma has reason to say to Frank that 'I think there is a little likeness between us'. However, they represent very different moral positions: Frank's means and ends bespeak unconventional double-dealing (private engagement and wooing another woman to cover this status), while Emma's position necessitates a duplicitous discourse to work her way through the convention of paternal fantasies, and enact what she honestly thinks to be the best course of action at that time. With this useful language, the price the subject pays is to learn duplicity unconsciously at an early age.

The change from a duplicitous language to the practice of 'moral duplicity' is just a step away. From the harmony of impersonal principles and personal happiness, the subject discovers an inevitable factor: personal desire. To Hegel, 'moral duplicity'

occurs because the subject has discovered 'its basic contradiction in several directions' (PS §617, 374). Robinson describes how the moral subject now knows

there is a disequilibrium between the agent and the universal, and it is one of which the agent is conscious....there is a persistence in this mode of action which inevitably involves falsity; a declaration or assertion...of moral principles which the agent knows he manipulates for his own purposes.⁹

Once a personal factor is involved, a moral subject can come up with a 'whole nest' of thoughtless contradictions in the struggle between its desire and impersonal principles (e.g. to buy or not to buy, to greet or not to greet this person). The shuffling of contradictory positions on the part of the inconsistent subject is described by Hegel in this way,

The way in which consciousness proceeds in this development, is to establish one moment and to pass directly from it to another, seeing aside the first; ...as soon as it has *set up* this second moment, it also *sets it aside* again, and really makes the opposite moment the essential one. At the same time, it is also aware of its contradiction and *shiftiness* (PS §617, 314 emphasis original).

What saves the subject from turning moral duplicity into a deliberate, witty subversion of values is its serious spirit. The subject is deeply aware of its 'lack of seriousness'. Instead of using wit to justify its shiftiness, the subject feels ashamed and is 'profoundly conscious' of the moments of 'insincere shuffling' (PS §617, 314). In the novel, Austen also echoes Hegel on the importance of a 'serious spirit': it has led her heroine to an internal dialogue to balance her 'vain spirit'. As Knightley says, 'If [the vain spirit] leads you wrong, I am sure the other [the serious spirit] tells you of it' (330).

The domineering nature of desire pushes the subject to lose the heroic will to follow its duty. The subject cannot love someone she has no intention of liking. Instead of positing its happiness in relation to an impersonal principle, the moral subject thinks, in this case, that the postulated harmony is insincere. Emma is jealous of Jane and has no wish to befriend her. Their similar age but unequal positions reveal to Emma—the sovereign—that she is the loser in the battle of accomplishment. As a result, Emma is never happy 'to pay civilities to a person she

did not like through three long months!’ (166). Austen exposes the fact that the moral subject has the serious spirit to become aware of her contradictory claims. Austen notes that Emma knows she has ‘no better [reason to dislike Jane]’ other than her connections (her aunt), and her dispositional difference. It is an excuse that Emma knows she manipulates for her purposes. ‘It was a dislike so little just—every imputed fault was so magnified by fancy, that [Emma] never saw Jane Fairfax...without feeling that [Jane] had injured her’ (167). Laura Mooneyham has well pointed out that Emma’s Dixon plot is just a strategic scheme to ‘demote’ Jane.

Emma thus demotes Jane Fairfax in her imagination from a statue of moral perfection. When Frank teases Jane Fairfax about the piano in Emma’s presence, her ‘smile of secret delight’ which Emma’s sharp eye detects enables Emma to see her rival for Highbury’s adulation in less praiseworthy terms: ‘when on glancing...towards Jane Fairfax she caught the remains of a smile,...she had less scruple in the amusement, and much less compunction with respect to her.—This amiable, upright, perfect Jane Fairfax was apparently cherishing very reprehensible feelings’ (243). The Dixon plot is Emma’s way of forcing Jane Fairfax off her pedestal of moral superiority.¹⁰

Austen forces the reader to see that moral duplicity leads the subject to manipulate arguments to see what she wants to see, to dislike what she dislikes: Jane’s manners signify ‘coldness and reserve’, and Emma loves to ‘cavil at’ Jane’s skin ‘as wanting color’ (167). But in a softened charitable mood, Emma is capable of making objective judgment, i.e. Jane Fairfax’s beauty and manners are little seen in Highbury. Her style of beauty manifests distinction. Hence, Emma feels sorry that nobody takes the trouble ‘to scheme about for [Jane]’ in husband-hunting (168). However, the subject is too deeply tied to self-interest to forget its original stance. Emma refuses to take action as she keeps recanting ‘past prejudices and errors’¹¹

⁹ Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind: An essay in the real and the ideal* 119.

¹⁰ Mooneyham, *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen’s Novels* 121.

¹¹ Many critics criticize Emma for her lack of insight. Susan Morgan says, ‘The friend Emma should have chosen is Jane, the only character close to her in age, accomplishments, and consciousness—in many ways Emma’s superior. That is why Emma, who prefers power to equality, does not befriend Jane’ (*In the Meantime* 34) Tobin points out that ‘Emma can provide a retreat from her cramped and confining home, and offer her the opportunity to indulge her taste for the genteel style of life she was accustomed to at the Campbell home. Emma is threatened by Jane’s accomplishments because to recognize her talents and accomplishments is to recognize the power of ability as if it were equivalent to that of position and property. Emma knows that without her inherited status and wealth, she would fall short in a comparison with Miss Fairfax. Envious of and threatened by Jane’s real accomplishments, Emma cannot tolerate equality with a woman who, without property and position,

(ibid). Upon hearing Jane's reserved answer to her questions on Frank Churchill, Emma cannot 'forgive her' (169).

If the subject is shifty in recognizing others' virtue in the face of self-interest, the subject is even shiftier in the face of its changing self-interest. Austen features Emma's shuffling of contradictory positions in her romantic and marital decisions. The subject loudly makes a claim, defies the paternal custom that decrees a woman must get married. Emma refuses to marry on personal grounds: 'Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield' (84). She declares her determination not to be subordinated by anyone. But curiosity has directed the moral subject to make another claim, and have a new interest in romance. As soon as Emma learns the name 'Frank Churchill', she quickly fantasizes that he must be the very man that can engage her heart. Eventually, the moral subject makes a third claim owing to her love of independence. In her imagination, Emma only thinks of refusing Frank to re-assert her desire for sovereignty. In Emma's attitude to Mr Knightley, Austen pushes her readers to realize that Emma undergoes an even more dramatic change of attitude. At the beginning, Knightley is just an old friend to entertain her father during lonely evenings. However, the subject's interest is renewed when she knows that there might be a change in the relationship: the possible appearance of a competitor. The moment Emma knows that Mrs Weston is thinking of a match between Jane and Knightley, she states her strong opposition for the sake of little Henry. The actual rise of a competitor (Harriet) intensifies the subject's interest. Due to Harriet, Emma is being 'threatened with [the] loss' of Knightley. She suddenly discovers her heart's desire and believes that Knightley must marry no one but her. In the story, Emma's self-interest then takes a new turn: the old argument of sovereignty recurs again, but this time on altruistic grounds. 'Nothing should separate her from her father. She would not marry, even if she were asked by Mr Knightley' (416). Sixteen pages later, Austen notes that her heroine could not find 'a heart more disposed to accept'

lays claims to elegance and gentility. Preferring the non-threatening and clearly inferior Harriet who is without property, position, gentility or accomplishments, Emma rejects Miss Bates' niece as too cold and reserved for her taste and preserves her fragile sense of superiority. ("Aiding Impoverished Gentlewoman: Power and Class in *Emma*" 420).

Knightley (432). The swift promise to marry Knightley makes Emma realize that she has not considered the welfare of little Henry or her father a barrier at all. Emma understands her contradictions and shiftiness; she reflects on them with a 'saucy conscious smile' (449).

If moral duplicity arises due to a gap between the subject's moral intention and desire, Austen leads Emma to see this gap through one mechanism: Harriet. Emma gives a seemingly consistent rationale for liking Harriet in the first place. Harriet 'was a very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired. She was short, plump and fair' (23). In contrast to Emma's immediate rejection of Jane Fairfax ('her height was pretty', 'her figure is particularly graceful', 'her size a most becoming medium'), the 'Harriet function' holds the key to understanding the nature of self-deception. We are led to ask this question: why does a person deliberately select an inferior company (or entertainment, movie, game) to avoid approaching the 'core' values (e.g. good books, art, music) that s/he claims to like? We must remember that Emma herself 'has the highest value for elegance' (167). Even though a person fails to attain this level of excellence, why does s/he absolutely refuse to approach this quality found in another person? Readers are reminded of the way Emma feels 'injured' by the sight of Jane.

Using a different language, Lacan explains moral duplicity in a new way. To him, the subject establishes its primary identification with the master's values. The subject invests in these values (in the case of Emma, drawing and music) to posit itself at a certain point and build a certain status. As Mark Bracher says, this identification allows the subject 'to have an identity in which I can recognize myself and be encountered and recognized by others'.¹² However, problems occur because the master's values are harsh and demanding. They require total identification, hard work, and do not allow any short-cut, or fantasmal maneuver. Hence, Lacan regards the best way to describe the master's enterprise is as '*death*'. For example, to imitate 'perfection' is to force the subject to labor according to the master's ideal, to subsequently accredit the subject with a masterly status, only to render the subject in

¹² Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Function of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse, Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, 112.

a 'self-same, static, frozen' state of being. In the story, Emma has practiced the art of drawing and music and gained a certain degree of proficiency. Art and music have enabled Emma to relate herself to other signifiers, or be recognized by the Highbury society. However, Emma represents the way in which the mind naturally resists the master's demand of total labor or the master's death-like state of perfect being. Austen considers this to be a humane response (even Knightley fails to appreciate Jane's perfect pedestaled state or reserved temper 288). But Austen also sensitizes the readers to see that this is the main cause of the subject's failed identity: Emma 'played and sang;—and drew in almost every style; but steadiness had always been wanting; and in nothing had she approached the degree of excellence which she would have been glad to command, and ought not to have failed of' (44). In turn, from a primary identification with the master's values, the subject switches to a state of division.

Lacan describes this state as one in which the subject fails to identify with itself, or coincide with itself. It is not an immoral duplicity, and Mark Bracher simply calls it 'the gap between thinking and being'.

The "I" that I think about never coincides completely with the "I" that does the thinking; the urges and characteristics that I take to be mine never exhaust or even adequately represent the forces that constitute my being and drive my thought and action—forces, moreover, that are themselves conflictual and self-contradictory.¹³

In short, the subject conceptually favors one thing (education), but actively prefers another 'lively choice' that can energize its thought and action ('Harriet'). Austen anticipates Lacan in understanding that this preference is in itself mingled with 'conflictual' forces. In Emma's self-proclaimed love of drawing, not one of the portraits 'had ever been finished' (44). But the moment Emma approaches Harriet (a choice that energizes her thought and action), the first concern is 'education', the inculcation of the mind; even though Emma has manifested a lack of desire to labor on them, and laments that Harriet has no talents in them either. The result of this divided state of being is happy duplicity and misrecognition, as the subject knows herself and yet does not want to understand herself thoroughly. It is a delicate situation that calls for (unconscious) self-deception, active deceit of others,

¹³ Ibid. 113.

dissimulation and confusion of what the subject acknowledges herself to like or dislike. Emma understands her inadequacy, 'the idleness of her childhood' (231), and how well she can perform: 'She was not much deceived as to her own skill' (44); 'she knew the limitations of her own powers too well to attempt more than she could perform with credits' (227). However, 'with mixed feelings' (227), the subject refuses to acknowledge openly her failure: Emma 'was not unwilling to have others deceived' (44). What's more, she reinstates the love of books as a sign proclaiming her support of education: Emma teaches Harriet to love art as 'an inducement to her to read more herself' (36).

Austen describes the result of this self-contradictory state from Knightley's perspective: Emma is not a genuine promoter/lover of education or Knowledge, for with Harriet's 'delightful inferiority', Emma learns self-complacency only. She must 'imagine' she has nothing 'to learn herself' (38). In turn, Harriet's inferiority can only be reassuring. Harriet fails to decode the charade 'courtship', and Emma happily corrects her, 'Nonsense! My dear Harriet...Give me the paper and listen' (73). Austen ironically notes that while the subject knows she has failed the 'core' identity, the subject refuses to confront it or remedy the situation. Instead, the subject seeks very delicate ways to console herself, to turn her failure into a new business, and appropriate the values she longs for. Emma 'has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old' (37), but she failed in this project. Instead, she has become a specialist in drafting good booklists. Her booklists are noticed by Knightley to be 'very well chosen, and very neatly arranged—sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule' (ibid). She endeavors to invite Harriet to be her companion so that they can work out an even better list. Austen critiques the 'game' of education in this way: 'It was much easier to chat than to study; much pleasanter to let [Emma's] imagination range...than to be laboring to enlarge [Harriet's] comprehension or exercise it on sober facts' (69).

In other words, the 'Harriet function' is, to the divided subject, an object of desire to fill up the gap between thinking and being. The subject can appear to be hard-working without laboring on the legitimate task, it can 'love' education without actually doing it (self deception). It can cheat the world that it is committed to a good cause or the bettering of the Other's mind (dissimulation). By postponement, it hides

from itself that it does not have any genuine love of Knowledge (misrecognition). Emma always pushes Harriet to read 'the first few chapters', then they will have 'the intention of going on tomorrow' (69). In the height of moral duplicity, the subject can talk about one thing and whole-heartedly pursue another. Emma wants to be the 'good hands' which turn Harriet into 'a valuable woman' (58). In the name of 'help', Emma represents the way in which the moral subject is dimly aware of her abandonment of her educative program, and turns to the practice of tricks or emotional manipulation (such as drawing Harriet taller than she is (48), loosening her boot-laces to maximize contact between Mr Elton and Harriet, or dictating a letter for Harriet to refuse Mr Martin).

Emma cannot bear to see Jane because she is forced to confront her two strongly desired states of being: pleasure versus a masterly status ('teaching'/playing with Harriet versus Jane's outstanding accomplishment). This confrontation can only rouse the subject to an aggressive mood. The subject firmly supports enjoyment ('Dear Harriet!—I would not change you for the clearest-headed, longest-sighted, best judging female breathing' 269). However, Emma acknowledges and yet resists admitting her failure. After listening to Jane's superior performance, Emma practices the piano for one hour and a half 'vigorously' on the next day (231) as a mark of remedy/resistance. *She* has the 'potential' to be a brilliant pianist too.

With the subject's adamant defense of its desire, Austen invites us to challenge the subject's way of punctuating a text. To Lacan, we all punctuate speeches to make messages readable, to determine their meaning retroactively. The subject believes that it is 'supposed to know'. However, the analyst's job is to question this tendency. The analyst's utterance position is founded on the destitution of the subject that is supposed to know. In other words, the analyst's (silent) maneuver pushes the subject to understand that it does not know what and why it speaks in this way, its 'truth' is the work of desire, with 'the unconscious as production'.¹⁴ In the text, Emma's position represents the way in which the subject presumes that it knows the human mind. Hence, Emma declares, 'A lucky guess is never merely luck' (13). Austen shows us that a subject who thinks she-is-supposed-to-know can be blind. Emma

¹⁴ Braustein, "Con-jugating and Playing with the Fantasy: The Utterances of the Analyst" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society* 152.

hears Elton's eloquent appreciation of her art; and she also knows his ignorance of art ('You know nothing about drawing. Don't pretend to be in raptures about mine' 43). However, Emma engages Elton at that level to maintain that particular stance. Ignoring Elton's flattery ('How could you suppose me ignorant? Is not this room rich in specimens of your landscapes and flowers...' 43), Emma focuses on the '*slightest slip of the tongue*' on Elton's part. It is in this endeavor to highlight the minor slip of the tongue that drives Emma to disregard his manifest message with open eyes. Emma says she refuses to take any likeness, but for Harriet's sake, she will do it again—for 'there are no husbands and wives in the case at present' (46). Mr Elton's repetition of the phrase 'No husband and wives in the case *at present* indeed' rouses Emma 'with so interesting a consciousness, that Emma began to consider whether she had not better leave them together'. By singling out specific phrases (husbands, wives, at present), Emma believes that she has uncovered the truth of the Other. Another famous incident is the charade. Emma cleverly deduces the word 'courtship'. With words like 'soft eye' (72), Emma concludes that '[t]here can be no doubt of its being written for you and to you' (73) even though she sees all the inconsistencies ('Harriet's ready wit!'). By creating a 'truth' that confirms the supposed knowledge, the subject always forecloses a knowledge. Elton's speedy act of buying a frame for Harriet's portrait, is, to Emma, the unmistakable 'flames of love'—while Austen ironically indicates that it is Emma who wishes to 'frame' Elton.

Emma invites readers to witness the fact that the subject can never be the master of its own or the Other's discourse. By foregrounding how 'a saying [can imply] another saying, a saying in suspense'¹⁵, Austen pushes her readers to critique Emma's interpretation. Emma represents the Freudian subject's belief (that there is a 'truth' to be uncovered within a message): Elton has said more than he had intended, his meaning is not fixed on the surface discourse but has a 'truer' meaning. It is only through the slip of the tongue that reveals the (unconscious) link between words and his associations with Harriet. Austen anticipates Lacan in seeing that the irony is on the insistence on 'knowledge': the subject is supposed to know even the unconscious. Lacan suggests that the statements in themselves (right or wrong) are

¹⁵ Ibid. 151.

not important, the crux lies in making the subject see why it makes this association and respond to its own fantasy. In opposition to the (knowledgable) subject's belief that a 'true' message is hidden beneath a statement, Austen's text silently points out to the reader that no subject can uncover the truth of or *for* the Other (match-making, or mind-reading). All utterances can be interpreted in numerous ways: changing the punctuation can renew or upset the fixed meaning the subject has attributed to a speech (E 99). What is more, the speaker itself may change the interpretations of a specific utterance due to a change of circumstances. With different listeners (the hypothetical Other) in mind, the convoluted nature of language always allows the speaker or listener to think a speech is saying more than it is (S1 54). Elton's proposal in the carriage bespeaks an unexpected process of punctuation of Emma's speech on his side. It forces Emma to hear back her (mis)interpretation in a shockingly inverted form. Elton takes Emma's silence as a positive response, and exclaims, 'Charming Miss Woodhouse! allow me to interpret this interesting silence. It confesses that you have long understood me' (131). Emma's reflection afterwards represents the way in which a subject is pushed to confront its unconscious fantasy—i.e. the love of knowledge and the desire to appear to be knowledgeable. The text tells us that Emma has responded to this new awareness. Emma experiences an altered sense of identity and accepts the destitution of her knowledge. The subject is no longer supposed to know. This realization forces her to have a new perception of human relationships. Hence, Emma repents and says she will disown any future knowledge of hearts, or not favor direct interference anymore: 'Let no name pass our lips. We were very wrong before, we will be cautious now' (342).

* * *

Emma goes beyond moral duplicity caused by the incompatibility between the subject's rules and desire. In fact, the main theme of Austen's story is to lead us to see that personal desire is singularly *impersonal*. As Lacan says, desire is the desire of the Other, desire is produced as an effect of the signifier. Hence, he comes to theorize a 'duplicitous subjectivity' in which the 'I' is not of 'I'. By recognizing this Otherness of desire, the subject can begin to have a process of resubjectivization that responds to the true voice of being, to relinquish its imaginary autonomy. In the novel, the mechanism Austen uses is two love triangles. Emma's desire towards

Knightley is roused *because* Harriet desires Knightley. Knightley's desire for Emma is intensified by the presence of Frank Churchill.

It is in this sense that I try to refute the traditional interpretation of seeing the marriage of Emma and Knightley as the result of an 'incestuous love'. The Lacanian 'duplicity of desire' reveals to us that desire is constructed through images and words, and is conveyed through language and the Other. The moment Harriet wants Knightley, Emma discovers her love for Knightley. And she is determined to rob Harriet of her fantasy and keep him to herself (which explains her guilt consciousness towards Harriet). No 'pain and contrition' or 'generosity' (431) can tempt her to give up Knightley. And before Frank arrives in Highbury, Knightley says nothing about his 'love' of Emma. In fact, he says '[he] should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return'. '[I]t would do her good'. Then he notices that 'there is nobody hereabouts to attach her' (41 versus a man in love would not want to see his 'secret love' fall in love). In this way, *Emma* is a story that anticipates the Lacanian postulate: misrecognition is always at the center of one's being. The subject cannot know what it wants, and its desire can only be produced by the Other's representation/recommendation—only to be misrecognized as its own desire. In language, the subject may opt for a discursive unity and independence. As a result, the subject 'mistakenly thinks it can represent its own totality by designating itself in a statement' (E 315). Emma's 'declaration of independence' reveals how a subject can construct an autonomous world by presenting itself from a purely symbolic viewpoint:

If I know myself, Harriet, mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many independent resources;...Woman's usual occupations of eye and hand and mind will be as open to me then as they are now;....my attachment to...[nieces and nephews] can equal that of a parent, it suits my ideas of comfort better than what is warmer and blinder. (85)

However, the politics of desire will reveal to the subject that it is always dependent on the Other. Lacan simply says this: desire is essentially 'desire of the Other's desire'.

This statement can be elaborated in two ways: first, it implies a social reliance on the Other. The subject's first desire is always to be recognized by and through the Other. If we think of a baby, its first wish is always to be recognized by the mother,

its desired object being breasts, gaze, and maternal voice. Likewise, the adult's desire for recognition is as intense as the baby's. However, its objects of desire are mediated through society/language (cars, class status). Says Lacan, human desire 'is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire, whatever it is, is recognized in the full sense of the term' (S1 183). In the story, until Harriet names her love in the presence of Emma, Emma cannot know her heart's desire. '[Emma's] own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes' (408). Second, this statement (desire is the desire of the Other) implies an antagonistic relationship between the subject and the Other, due to the fact that the subject's desire also coincides with the friend's desire. The moment the subject discovers the friend poses a real threat to its desired object, the subject starts making strange accusations, and eventually separates itself from this person forever. Hence Kojève notes that 'social' desire can also be the most 'asocial'.¹⁶ 'The reason for this goes back to the former point about human desire being desire for recognition; by desiring that which another desires, I can make the other recognize my right to possess that object, and thus make the other recognize my superiority over him'.¹⁷ In this struggle, the desired object is chosen in this way,

It is *qua* Other that the subject desires (E 312): that is, the subject desires from the point of view of another. The effect of this is that 'the object of man's desire...is essentially an object desired by someone else' (Lacan, 1951b: 12). What makes an object desirable is not any intrinsic quality of the thing in itself but simply the fact that it is desired by another.¹⁸

Eventually, the problem of friendship and hostility in the dialectic of desire is postulated by Lacan to be a hopeless entanglement,

Desire is first grasped in the other, and in the most confused form. The relativity of human desire in relation to the desire of the other is what we recognize in every reaction of rivalry, of competition, and even in the entire development of civilization, including this sympathetic and fundamental exploitation of man by man whose end is by no means yet in sight (S1 147).

¹⁶ Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. trans. James Nichols (1947 [1933-39]) New York: Basic Books, 1969), 88.

¹⁷ Ibid. 40.

¹⁸ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 38.

Lacan specifically points out that the subject is totally ignorant of itself, or of its desire being the desire of the Other. Edward Casey and J. Melvin Woody describe the situation as a 'systematic misrecognition',

For Lacan, the subject cannot know what he wants at the outset: his very existence consists in a systematic *meconnaissance*. The very process of psychoanalysis is one of coming to know one's desiring self from a state of initial symptomatic ignorance; it is a matter of the recognition of repressed desire.¹⁹

Emma unveils the 'systematic' misrecognition of the mind. At the beginning of the story, Emma's enunciating position represents a person building a unifying worldview through the use of symbols (money, language): 'Fortune I do not want', 'I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall' (84). Emma misrecognizes herself as an enlightened, independent subject with little desire for recognition. Eventually, Austen's story reveals to us that her statement ('not in want') paradoxically manifests a strong desire for recognition. Emma wants to be admired by Harriet, and this sentence has particularly resulted in Harriet's recognition of Emma's peculiarity. In the story, Emma is 'always first and always right' in her father's eyes (84). In contradistinction to the subject's idea of (symbolically constructed) independent selfhood, the subject is heavily dependent on the other's perception of itself. This gap between the speaking subject and the desiring subject is ironically foregrounded in the novel: Emma's love of recognition has almost overwhelmed her. She likes Harriet because Harriet shows a very 'proper...deference' to Emma, and seems 'so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield' (23). Emma does not like Jane Fairfax because Jane refuses to give her sufficient attention. 'Wrapt up in a cloak of politeness, [Jane] seemed determined to hazard nothing. She was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved' (169). In this strong reaction to the non-responsive Other, Emma's reaction sensitizes readers to know how the subject loves social distinction, and expects/depends on the Other to give her a due share of recognition. Instead of independence, Austen features Emma's dependent state of being. On one occasion, Emma cannot get her first position because of her single status. As Mrs Elton leads the way to the ball, Emma

¹⁹ Edward Casey and J. Melvin Woody, "Hegel, Heidegger and Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire" in *Interpreting Lacan* 97.

feels so frustrated that it is almost 'enough to make her think of marrying' (325). In turn, Austen's heroine manifests what Kojève calls a very 'human' nature as he says the mind

desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other...that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired', or 'loved', or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value.....In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire...is, finally, a function of desire for 'recognition'.²⁰

Though human desire always points towards a fixed end (the love of being recognized), in *Emma*, Austen shows us that the subject has no fixed pursuit. The flux of desire is always related to language and can be transferred by a metonymic substitution of signifiers, depending on the context. In the novel, the subject's desire is often the effect of social and moral discourses. In accordance with landed-gentry values, Emma loves to appear to be knowledgeable, to be distinctively recognized on public occasions. But she also likes simple manners, alms-giving and helping others according to the moral (egalitarian) discourse. In turn, Austen presents to the readers the way in which this clash leads to a curious combination of liking and rejecting Robert Martin. Emma judges that Martin is unsuitable for Harriet because he is a 'farmer'—a signifier that, through the dynamics of linguistic identification, deflates a gentlewoman's relationship to the social order. However, she finds that Mr Martin has written a 'good letter', it is 'strong and concise', 'vigorous, decided with sentiments' (51).

In the Box Hill crisis, Austen indicates that the flux of desire can lead to a problematic clash or a careless switch of signifiers. Emma's behavior typifies that of a moral lady who has always desired to act kindly to people like the Bates (*moral* recognition), but can, due to the desire of the moment, switch to the clever, playful discourse in order to be *socially* recognized—given the context that no one is talking. Emma knows that she and Frank are 'talking nonsense for the entertainment of seven silent people' (369). The context soon changes to a new one: Frank orders everyone to tell a story. Emma immediately embraces an 'adjudicating discourse' to find pleasure in being *intellectually* recognized. 'Emma could not resist' herself from telling the world that *she* knows the problems of Miss Bates. The flux and sliding of these desirable signifiers (kindness, cleverness, discernment) show how the subject's

speaking position is funded by heterogeneous discourses; however, these variables all point towards one constant: the desire for recognition, to be positively, morally, socially, or intellectually affirmed by the Other. While Austen intends Knightley's words to be harsh and transformative, this exhortation actually heightens the game of recognition instead of putting it aside. His words call for the re-surfacing of the moral signifier; that is, the subject should prefer moral recognition to social or intellectual glory. It does not point towards a new understanding of desire, it does not lead the subject to question the basis of its love of recognition (as an attempt to fill up the void of being). It does not force the subject to discover that its desire for recognition has reduced it to a state of addiction or an irrational rejection of the Other (Jane).

In this game of sliding signifiers (for the purpose of being recognized in different contexts), Austen leads us to see why a woman (Harriet) can 'love three men in a year' (450). Harriet Smith's problem shows that a woman is excited after being romantically recognized by a man (Robert Martin). But this is suppressed by Emma's recognition of her as a new beauty in the gentry circle. Austen stresses Emma's misguidance on a young mind, but critics do not notice that Emma's way is not unlike teaching a new language (Fort! Da!) game for the exchange of signifiers and control of reality. Freud notices that his grandson uses the phrase 'Fort!' (the word approximates 'gone' in German) to mark the loss of the cotton reel and 'Da!' for the return of the reel. Freud takes the Fort! Da! game as a linguistic means of 'marking' or 'representing' the loss and return of a desired object (the mother) through a binary pair of phonemes. Lacan re-interprets this game to see it as a discursive attempt to *control* the desired object's presence and absence through language, to lessen the trauma of helplessness. The idea is 'to control the mother's presence and absence through language, substituting a linguistic relation, which the child may control, for the mother's presences and absences, which it does not control'. In Elizabeth Grosz's words, 'The game converts the child's passivity into activity through language and play'.²¹ In a similar way, Emma is teaching Harriet to play the Fort! Da! game to say 'Elton' to mean the coming of class-status (object of

²⁰ Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. 6.

²¹ Grosz, Jacques Lacan. *A Feminist Introduction* 60.

desire), and 'Martin' to mean the absence of class-recognition. By exciting a person's desire for higher recognition, Emma's success shows us that it is easy to mobilize a subject to move from one signifier to another (Martin to Elton, one designer brand for another). By replacing feelings with a linguistic relation that points towards a more profitable identity politics (Elton), the subject is playing a language game that is impersonal to its own wish. What is more, the absence of Elton's affection does not matter for it is an imaginary (linguistic) relation. From a passive lady—who thinks Robert Martin is good enough for her—to the learning of the 'merits' of Elton, Harriet typifies how a subject has cut off a lived, immediate relation to reality or its own feelings. Upon hearing Emma's persuasive words on her influence on Elton, 'Harriet smiled again, and her smiles grew stronger' (56).

As the essence of the Fort! Da! game is to encourage self-determinacy so that the child can actively *control* reality without any external mediation (e.g. the child can, through verbalization, be happy with *or* without the company of the mother), eventually, the child will engineer its own substitution/language to satiate its new desire, as the floating nature of language always allows further substitutions and changes to take place. In the story, Austen reveals to us that Emma is highly annoyed by Harriet's 'unauthorized substitution' of signifiers. Emma always pretends to encourage the self-determining ability of Harriet: after reading Martin's proposal, she says, 'I will have nothing to do with it. This is a point which you must settle with your own feelings' (52). However, Emma is greatly upset by Harriet's love for Knightley. Through the mechanism of substitution (by directing desire to fancy the name 'Knightley'), Harriet has transformed her passivity into an active attempt to create and control her future—to seek moral *and* class recognition ('Knightley'). Emma has taught Harriet that love/desire can be produced by language (after a shift of linguistic relations), hence it is quite natural for a young lady to further substitute one signifier (Elton) with another signifier (Knightley) when one name ('Elton') can no longer give her any gratification, while the other name gives her greater recognition. As this process has occurred before, Harriet does not need further assistance, as the process of switching signifiers is just the same as the change from 'Martin' for 'Elton'. Harriet no longer needs Emma's guidance to complete her substitution of signifiers, her transference of 'love'. If one thinks in terms of the

Fort! Da! game, this make-believe language game allows the child to have a greater control over, if not the external world, at least its psychic reality. Thus Harriet becomes 'less humbled, had fewer scruples than formerly. Her inferiority, whether of mind or situation, seemed little felt. She had seemed more sensible of Mr Elton's being to stoop in marrying her, than she now seemed of Mr Knightley's' (414). The friendship quickly turns sour between the ladies.

The subject's desire is finally revealed when the Other turns out to be a threat to the subject. Ragland's words perfectly mirror the antagonistic state of human desire: 'Desire drives people to seek recognition at the other's expense and, if necessary, to annihilate the other to validate their own belief system'.²² In *Emma*, after hearing Harriet's declaration of love, Emma's 'spontaneous burst' of response is this: 'Oh God! that I had never seen her!' (411). This aggressive negation of the rival is swiftly completed after Emma understands her heart's desire. And Austen tells us that a subject cannot understand itself unless through the perceived desire of the Other (Harriet). Harriet praises Knightley very warmly, and Emma's 'love' of Knightley becomes evident *suddenly*—though she has spent her entire life with him as 'a very old and intimate friend' (9).

Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr Knightley...? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself! (408)

It is in this sense that I see the birth of Emma's desire for Knightley, or Knightley's love for Emma, as having nothing to do with transgressive, incestuous love. In opposition to moral transgression, the change is emphasized by Austen to be a very understandable one. Austen's story reveals how the effect of language, through the perceived desire or the language of the Other, can make the subject understand its longing at once. Harriet's praise of Knightley makes Emma realize that he has all that she craves for: knowledge, status, and moral recognition. Austen's story anticipates Lacan's theory as Emma notices that she is under a 'systematic *méconnaissance*' throughout her life (to use the word of Casey and Woody 97). In *Emma*, the 'transmission of desire' is accomplished smoothly. As noted by Ragland,

²² Ragland. *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*. (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 272-3.

the structure of the subject's desire can 'in the same gap' be 'opened up by the effect of the signifier in those who come to represent the Other' for her. The desired object is simply a 'thing...performed by the Other in speech'.²³ Simply put, prior to representation (language, commercials, ranking), there is no desire. Prior to Harriet's portrayal of Knightley, Emma has never considered Knightley as an object of romantic interest. She has 'never instituted the comparison' between Frank Churchill and Knightley to draw out 'the infinite superiority' of the latter (412). And before Mr Weston's interesting description of Frank Churchill, Emma does not fancy Frank. His rise as an object of interest is very much due to his positive portrayal by his parents, his prolonged absence and his presence as a man of letters. But once Harriet re-presents Knightley, Emma knows her desire is the desire for the 'ultimate recognition' which no one but Knightley can give her. Hence, Emma now believes that she has 'been entirely under a delusion, totally ignorant of her own heart—and, in short, that she had never really cared for Frank Churchill at all!' (ibid). This sudden elevation of Knightley and depreciation of Frank are extremely interesting as they reflect not only the birth of love, but that the desired object must be channeled through the words of the Other. Ragland quotes the words of James Glogowski, 'this is why one speaks of recognition as *recognition*. What was desired was known, 'cognized', but needed to be re-cognized before it could be realized'.²⁴

The subject's attitude manifests an immediate rise of hostility towards the rival. Emma's reaction is simply this: 'How can *you*—an inferior and ignorant girl—have Knightley! *I* must have him!' While the Other has enlightened the subject of its 'symptomatic ignorance',²⁵ the subject then lays bare the 'absolutist' nature of Desire. As Ragland puts it, desire is always 'the Desire to be, to know, to have'.²⁶ Kojève notices that desire can always give the subject a very powerful agency:

In contrast to the knowledge that keeps man in a passive quietude,
Desire disquiets him and moves him to action.²⁷

²³ Ragland, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 82.

²⁴ James Glogowski, "Essay on Psychopathology" in *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 84.

²⁵ Casey *et al*, "Hegel, Heidegger and Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire" 97.

²⁶ Ragland, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 84.

²⁷ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* 4.

Once Emma has decoded her love of Knightley, Austen portrays the way in which a subject can take swift action. Emma acts at once to cut off her relationship with Harriet. This opaque aggression shows in the drastic change of good-will to accusation: her best friend must be demoted. Harriet is now seen by Emma as a bold transgressor.

How Harriet could ever have had the presumption to raise her thoughts to Mr Knightley!—How she could dare to fancy herself the chosen of such a man till actually assured of it! (414).

In the meanwhile, she resolved against seeing Harriet.—It would do neither of them good...To talk would be only to irritate.—She wrote to [Harriet], therefore, kindly, but decisively, to beg that she would not, at present, come to Hartfield (416).

Emma's 'ardent wish' is that 'Harriet might be disappointed' (ibid). While the subject does not want to hurt the friend deliberately, the absolute nature of desire does not welcome negotiation. In the story, Emma's 'hatred' of Harriet leads her to a 'conscientious reflection' in which she accuses herself. The once altruistic attempt to educate Harriet is now a 'stupid' project, 'a folly which no tongue could express'. All of a sudden, Emma thinks that she should leave Harriet to marry Martin, to settle 'in the line of life to which she ought to belong—all would have been safe' (413-4). With an intense longing to keep the desired object, Emma shows how a subject can change from one signifier (kindness) to another signifier (dominance). It results in a sadly conservative political re-identification owing to private reasons as Emma turns to defend a philosophy of life that is based on the safe, gentry hierarchy. Owing to the fact that 'desire drives people to seek recognition at the other's expense',²⁸ Emma is delighted that 'Harriet was nothing, that she was every thing herself' (430).

No matter how enlightened the subject is, Austen's story reveals to us that there is no escape from this duplicitous, indirect (impersonal) desire. On the contrary, it proves exactly what Lacan says, 'The human object is originally mediated through rivalry, through the exacerbation of the relation to the rival, through the relationship of prestige and presence...Here we have a destructive and fatal relation among human beings' (S1 176-7). Mr Knightley embodies the enlightened voice of (interpersonal/class) harmony in *Emma*, but his desire is also roused in the same

²⁸ Ibid. 272.

competitive way. Prior to Frank Churchill, there is no love for Emma. Using free indirect discourse, Austen probes the unconscious of this excellent gentleman:

He *had been in love with Emma*, and jealous of Frank Churchill, *from about the same period, one sentiment having probably enlightened him as to the other*. It was his jealousy of Frank Churchill that had taken him from the country. (432, emphasis mine)

Austen mischievously foregrounds how volatile the human memory can be by contrasting this version with Knightley's own self-representation. For thirty pages later, Knightley gives an account of his love, and says 'I could not think about you so much without doating on you, faults and all; and by dint of fancying so many errors, have been in love with you ever since you were thirteen at least' (462). One may laugh at this *posterior* recognition of the rise of love. And Austen also makes us laugh at Knightley's problematization of the rival. Knightley may be a very rational character; but the same moral duplicity is at work: his personal dislike leads him to problematize his enemy using (falsely) grand reasons. Upon knowing that Emma expects Frank to be a superior man who can 'adapt his conversation to the taste of every body, and has the power as well as the wish of being universally agreeable' (150), Knightley, out of jealousy, twists this positive sociability to become an egotistical display of power. He says, 'if he turn[s] out any thing like it [what Emma imagines Frank should be], he will be the most insufferable fellow breathing! What! At three-and-twenty to be the king of his company—the great man—the practiced politician, who is to read every body's character, and make every body's talents conduce to the display of his own superiority' (ibid). Austen's story tells us that Knightley may seem to have a stronger moral foothold, however, there is no way to escape from the problem of desire and moral duplicity. Age or gender does not make any difference.

* * *

Emma unveils to us that the subject of enunciation and the desiring subject will always be different. The subject may give a totalizing, consistent account of its glorious conduct (Knightley has loved Emma for eight years at least, Emma does not love Frank at all), while desire will disclose another (contradictory) facet of the

subject ('an unfathomed reality, which insists beyond any willed intentionality'²⁹). Austen does not lead us to see it as a question of willful deceit, but instead, as a result of the limits of analytical knowledge. The subject cannot remember its original claim anymore, further probings will only result in a defensive insistence on its new position. In this way, we see that the mind can develop a 'resistance to knowledge' that is 'motivated by discourse networks that are closely linked to self-identity. The subject is unable and unwilling to entertain values and ideas that question its identity' or its new emotional, or ideological identification.³⁰ The 'reconciliatory' ending of *Emma* highlights Austen's cynical presentation of this '*ideologized resistance*' to knowing too much.

Emma knows that her victory means hurting her friend for a second time (for both Elton and Knightley do not favor Harriet), but Harriet's engagement with Robert Martin quickly relieves Emma of her guilty consciousness. And the desire to demote Harriet is quickly 'justified' when Harriet's parentage becomes known. With an 'interested' concern for ideological order, Emma becomes more and more conservative. She is delighted that Harriet, now to be seen by her not as an enemy but as a sub-class creature, can settle herself so well. Harriet is so denigrated by Emma that she is now believed to be *unfit* to be a wife even for a mean man like Mr Elton.

Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!—It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connexion had she been preparing for...Mr Elton!—The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed (482).

Austen leads us to realize the inconsistent stance of the subject. Emma begins a new process of (duplicitous) reasoning: instead of denouncing the mean Elton or the poor Martin, she sees that Harriet is now a 'lucky' creature because she considers that Martin is the 'fairest bid' her little friend can have (482). Emma, with a 'clear head', regards the intimacy between them 'must sink', their 'friendship must turn to a 'calmer sort of goodwill' (ibid). Austen shows us that Emma renames their friendship as 'past folly' (475), and refuses to remember the goodness of Harriet.

²⁹ Ragland, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 271.

³⁰ Alcorn, "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan through (and beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse, Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, 34.

‘Such a heart—such a Harriet!’ (ibid). Harriet becomes, to Emma, the representation of fickleness. And Emma definitely refuses to remember she has once considered this transfer of emotions to be desirable, and she herself has actively urged Harriet to be less constant. In the case of Elton,

[Harriet] did...prove herself more resolutely in love than Emma had foreseen; but yet it appeared to her so natural, so inevitable to strive against an inclination of that sort *unrequited*, that she could not comprehend its continuing very long in equal force (142-3).

In other words, Emma does not disapprove of a change of hearts in the case of an unrequited love. And Emma, owing to self-interest, even urges Harriet to ‘think less, talk less of Mr Elton for [her] sake’ because Harriet’s constancy can only be ‘a greater reproof for the mistake [she] fell into’ (268). But a change of circumstances brings a completely different re-view of Harriet’s integrity: Emma is like a traumatic subject who refuses to remember. At the end of the story, even Knightley comes to appreciate the merits of Harriet ‘good-qualities’ as a ‘good-tempered, soft-hearted’ (473), ‘artless, amiable girl, with very good notions, very serious good principles’ (474). However, Austen tells us that Emma still refuses to elevate Harriet. As Alcorn puts it, the subject does not want to remember for it ‘does not use knowledge to effect a freedom’; instead, the subject in fact *denies* knowledge in order to continue to [live with ideology].³¹ This failure to recognize the merits of the socially inferior subject not only reveals the fact that the subject is deeply tied to personal and ideological interests, but also to a stubborn resistance to knowing. Resistance ‘is a force employed by the subject (or an essential component of the subject)’ to prevent ‘the subject from knowing something that it knows or suspects but wants (at some level) to repress’.³² As resistance is tied to the dynamics of self-identity, fear, trauma, or desire, it has its ‘particular tenacity’. If ‘the missing knowledge is produced and placed in front of the subject, the resisting subject will seek to ‘deny, misinterpret, or dismiss such knowledge’ (35).

With a strong disinclination to know anyone that might threaten her (secure) identity, Emma is happy ‘in the prospect of Harriet’s welfare’ (475). Austen’s placid narration cynically ‘naturalizes’ this return of an almost cruel, rigid social

³¹ Alcorn, “The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan through (and beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts” 34.

stratification. Harriet's position becomes a new barrier. And friendship becomes out of the question as both sides submit to this ideological call without ill-will. In a cynical way, the story shows that all subjects must be schooled in reality. For the sake of a certain acknowledged self-interest, the established subject is 'afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestablished relations which' it once may find dubious, 'to accommodate to them, and finally even to carry out their business.'³³ In the end, Emma Woodhouse and Mr Knightley firmly reject the entry of any illegitimate blood into their class—even though these enlightened subjects both know the lady in question is thoroughly guileless and its blood is 'likely to be untainted'.

If an inter-class 'reconciliation' implies separation, Austen gives us a less pessimistic picture on intra-class reconciliation. Emma befriends Jane and Frank Churchill (who uses her and wrongs Jane) with much less mixed feelings and resistance—for they pose no threat to her desired object (Knightley). On the other hand, the politics of desire for recognition helps impede this friendship. Emma wants to be recognized as a nice lady to compensate her past unkindness to Jane. In the meantime, Emma always gets her fair share of recognition from Frank Churchill. Emma is merely angry with Frank on moral grounds. However, in the novel, morality is proved to be a less powerful motivator in comparison to desire. After he has won the hand of Emma, even Knightley—knowing the misdeeds of Frank—suddenly says that 'if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow' (433). In a similar vein, as Emma is 'so happy herself', she feels 'there was no being severe; and could he have entered the room, she must have shaken hands with him as heartily as ever' (444). To the end of the story, Emma remains 'pleased to see Frank Churchill'. The comparison of Frank with Knightley only brings her a greater pleasure of being recognized by both men while she thoroughly values the 'high superiority of the character' of Knightley (480).

As Austen writes, 'Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a

³² Ibid. 34.

³³ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* 6.

little mistaken' (431), the issue of the duplicitous desire remains constitutional to the human mind. The immoral characters may deceive others and twist everything to serve their selfishness. For example, Susan Morgan points out an interesting fact that Mrs Elton links everything with Maple Grove for she wants to be recognized and associated with its 'grandeur'. However, the moral subjects are not exempt from this game. In the subject's struggle to serve its own interests and the interests of the Other, to have serious reflection and an ideologized resistance to know, desire is an active determinant in 'intention and discourse and yet remain[s] opaque to consciousness'.³⁴

³⁴ Ragland, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 84.

Chapter 7: The Story of Action in *Persuasion*

The tragic oscillation between an agent's deliberation and the necessary risk or wagering inherent in action is one element of what led Hegel to look...for a way of getting some...account of agency.¹

If *Emma* reveals to us that deception exists in the center of subjectivity, in *Persuasion* Austen highlights the fact that, no matter how (self-)deceived the subject is, no one can be exempt from the responsibility of taking action, or escape from its consequences. Austen echoes Hegel in seeing 'conscience' as providing a precarious bridge across the gap between thinking and being, the gap of acting for the Other/duty and acting for the self. As each individual uses its conscience to choose the best course of action, the subject enacts moral duty while addressing the voice of its being, welfare or individuality. In the view of Robert Stern, the Hegelian concept of conscience can be defined as an optimal compromise between personal and moral interests—'each individual is positively committed to some definite universal moral law that has a determinate end, while at the same time avoiding the exclusive egoism and inwardness of pure individuality'.² However, conscience is by nature problematic as different individuals will have different consciences, and different phases of life will render a subject which upholds different perspectives. In the novel, Austen presents to us two equally valid versions of conscience: 1) the subject is a moral agent, and, with the passage of time, it grows to cherish a 'corrigibilist agency' to disidentify, reidentify and *re*-cognize the Otherness of moral laws in 'me' (to be explained later). 2) The subject believes that to be conscientious is to live up to its own moral decrees. However, it turns out that this self-determined action is a continuous reaction to the Other. And the subject's 'excentric agency' is unveiled at crucial moments as destroying the illusory unity of the 'I'. In *Persuasion*, Austen presents to us her anatomy and clash of conscientious actions.

The traditional views on *Persuasion* can be largely divided into two types: Austen, as some critics say, 'discovers romance and independence' in her mature years. Mary Lascelles says that, in *Persuasion*, 'it is the first time that Jane Austen has used this adjective [romantic] sympathetically'.³ Virginia Woolf suggests that in

¹ Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* 46.

² Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* 53.

³ Lascelles, *Jane Austen and her Art* 183.

Persuasion, Jane Austen ‘is beginning to discover that the world is larger, more mysterious, and more romantic than she had supposed. We feel it to be true of herself when she says of Anne: “She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning”’.⁴ Frank O’Conner calls *Persuasion* ‘the revenge of [Jane Austen’s] imagination on her judgement’.⁵ And W.R. Martin states that *Persuasion* ‘stands *Sense and Sensibility* on its head’.⁶ Meanwhile, the containment school holds the view that ‘a close examination’ of the novel will ‘give the ethically conservative impulse of *Persuasion* its proper force’.⁷ Wentworth is a member of the gentry class, and his return on shore does not contain any revolutionary message. David Spring accurately points out that romance has not changed the class structure: ‘Sir Walter Elliot is not abandoning his estate in removing to Bath, and renting his property, he is simply repairing his fortunes in a time-honoured way. At the end of seven years he will return to Kellynch’.⁸ In short, the two views insist that the movement of the novel is either to change Anne (embrace romance) or to change Wentworth (embrace ideology). In this reading, it is my intention to point out that Anne and Wentworth’s actions are far more complicated than these polarizing opinions allow for.

In the story, Austen has portrayed a world of young, conscientious subjects who try to find a balance between moral duty and the individual’s welfare in a gentry society. Wentworth and Anne are firmly anchored in the gentry class: Wentworth as the brother of the former curate of Monkford, and Anne the descendent of a prestigious family. However, in the midst of their class-consciousness, they ‘recognize duty as concrete action’, and ‘recognize its validity of the self in question’ (PS 573). Simply put, though under ideological constraints, these subjects are genuinely polite and considerate without submitting to the empty arbitrament of a class standard, or the sacrifice of personal interests. In a Hegelian way, Austen presents to us the way in which conscience can give the best guidance to the subject:

⁴ Woolf, *The Common Reader* 204.

⁵ O’Conner, “Jane Austen and the Flight of Fancy” quoted from Moler, *Jane Austen and the Art of Illusion* 188.

⁶ ‘Sensibility and Sense: A Reading of *Persuasion*,’ *English Studies in Africa* 3 (1960): 119.

⁷ Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* 183.

⁸ David Spring, “Interpreters of Jane Austen’s social world, literary critics and historians” in *Jane Austen, New Perspectives, Women and Literature*, ed. Janet Todd. (New York: New Series 1983) p. 53-69.

In conscience the 'task' or 'cause itself' is the subject. It includes in itself the aspect of social substantiality derived from the ethical sphere, the aspect of external authorization derived from the sphere of culture, and the self-knowing essentiality of morality. (PS 574)

In other words, the conscientious subject's action may upset the Other or the self, but the action-in-itself is intended to be neither a selfish sacrifice of the self or the other's interest, nor does it manifest a dissembling, hypocritical adherence to pure, impersonal moral claims. The language of conscience is a 'language of the self that knows itself as essential being'.⁹ As Hegel says,

Conscience expresses the absolute entitlement of subjective self-consciousness to know *in-itself* and *from-itself* what right and duty are, and to recognize only what it thus knows as the good (PR • 137, 164).

While Austen expects conscience to tell the individual what its 'right and duty' are, she does not see that it can give the subject any absolute entitlement or certainty. As Hegel later says, conscience gives the subject the authority to act, but it can also reduce the subject to a state of 'arbitrariness'—for no one can determine what is conscientious for the other, and 'conscience must act on its own incomplete knowledge which, because it is its own, is sufficient and complete' (PS 574). Ironically, due to the supreme power of conscience, the subject may 'oscillate hopelessly between self-doubt derived from the reactions of the others and its own self-certainty' (PS 575). In *Persuasion*, Austen decrees that her subjects must learn to clarify themselves by *repeated*, retrospective recognitions.

In opposition to the mainstream view that posits Anne Elliot as a pliant character, Austen has designed neither a 'transparent' subject nor a puppet. Claudia Johnson features Anne's maturity in this way,

Anne, like Emma, is an autonomous creature. For this reason, to conceptualize *Persuasion*, as readers so often do, as a debate between individualism and propriety is not only to employ an opposition already curiously loaded in favor of conservative arguments, but it is also to underestimate the degree of Anne's independence from traditional, paternal authority and to misplace the emphasis of the plot....Anne's decision to break off her engagement—has little to do with Sir Walter's paternal displeasure...Such is Anne's filial

⁹ Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* 97.

disposition at nineteen. At twenty eight she pays Sir Walter even less mind'.¹⁰

In *Persuasion*, Anne is always represented as a conscientious subject who tries to adhere to what she believes to be right. She is not afraid to upset others or inconvenience herself. Under the dictates of conscience, Anne incurs her sister's hatred by voicing her distrust of Mrs Clay. Before she leaves Somersetshire, she goes out of her way to visit 'almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave' because she knows they 'wished it' (39). From the very beginning of the story, Anne Elliot represents the way in which a moral agent has made a conscientious decision by weighing her own claims, the duty to the (m)Other, a genuine concern for herself and the welfare of the beloved one. The subject thinks she has a clear, moral intention, and yet by doing the deed itself the subject comes to discover that the decision itself is problematic. The subject loses the self-certainty that she once had, and it takes her eight and a half years to refute, doubt and re-defend that action. In this corrigibilist agency, Austen portrays the way in which the subject takes a retrospective view of action, and comes up with a new understanding to transform the present moment. In the words of Alan Speight, the corrigibilist

account of agency will also incorporate an intentional or first-person element of action, but it will be one that is not determined by an incorrigible content to which the agent has exclusive access; rather, what can be taken as intentional is something shaped by a process of revision in which an agent's account of what [she] did and why [she] did it is necessarily part of an ongoing dialectic between impersonal and personal sides of agency (56)

To explain this clearly, the subject may have one intention in mind; however, in retrospect, the subject will discover new (impersonal) elements which prompt the subject to make that decision. Citing Hegel's example and use of *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Speight explains that, 'in Antigone's case', a subject's conscientious action can be made 'between her (personal and prereflective) commitment to "family" and the (impersonal and retrospectively understood) relation of those claims to the broader ethical world in which they can be articulated' (ibid). In other words, the corrigibilist view no longer upholds a unifying view on conscience or the self, it seeks to understand the 'why' of an agent's action, the

¹⁰ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* 146.

circumstances, the identity of the agent. The agent may come to recognize or regret that what she attempted to do proved in the end different from what she thought she was attempting to do, but she comes to understand why she did what she did, and how she may come to re-view/rejustify this decision. In this process, the new understanding of the past not only changes the account of responsibility ('how it is that an agent understands her action as her own'¹¹), but also generates a new motivation to act *now* in order to redress/address to the past.

Anne Elliot has retracted, at the age of nineteen, from her engagement to Wentworth. And it is in this insignificant 'little history' (28) that Austen builds her entire story on, and explores the nature and the problem of action. At first, Anne Elliot is portrayed as a firm, mature subject at twenty-eight. On the plan for retrenchment, Austen contrasts Anne Elliot's decisiveness with the Elliots' love of frivolity: 'every emendation of Anne's had been on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity' (12). This placid narration of a resolute Anne proves to be a big contrast with the agitated narrative fourteen pages later. On the question of engagement, Anne Elliot has, within a short period of time, made a decision, and upon further reflection or persuasion, changed her mind. Austen invites readers to understand how Anne has changed in seven years. 'How eloquent could Anne Elliot have been' on 'over-anxious caution'. '[S]he learned romance as she grew older' (30). As a result, critics have argued that Anne's rejection of Wentworth is an impulsive one, it is a decision made under the influence of Lady Russell. Anne is a firm supporter of 'romantic' beliefs.

If we read between the lines and trace Anne's argument in the separation process, we can perceive that Anne's decision is a conscientious choice instead of an inauthentic act made up by the Other for her. Hence, she is ultimately responsible for this decision, not Lady Russell. In the first place, the background of the retraction is not Lady Russell's persuasive voice, but money. As Claudia Johnson says, Anne Elliot is an intellectually autonomous creature who never heeds Sir Walter's 'paternal displeasure' (146). However, without her father's support, money becomes

¹¹ Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* 56.

the dominant issue on the next page. 'Captain Wentworth had no fortune' (27). In that regard, the patriarch's 'great astonishment, great coldness, great silence' is actually the quietest, and the *most* persuasive action that contributes to the dissolution of the engagement. It punishes any transgressive romance with a silent but effective 'financial dismissal'. If Sir Walter has dutifully given Anne her due share of the ten thousand pounds (248), probably no disfavor from him or Lady Russell can dissuade Anne from her first decision to marry Wentworth. (In the novel, Charles Musgrove's words particularly highlight this fact: 'It is very fit that [women] should have daughters' shares'; 'they have...a right to it' 218.) Without any financial security established in the foreseeable future, all ladies in the nineteenth century would instinctively know that it is a risky business to get entangled in a hopelessly long engagement—with only changes and uncertainty in the future. Mrs Croft and Mrs Musgrove's dialogue later in the novel only confirms this view.

If money (not Sir Walter) is the latent cause of separation, Lady Russell's role in the affair can be easily ascertained. In the story, Austen has led readers to disidentify and empathize with Lady Russell's 'rational' perspective masked behind a gentry ideology. Lady Russell has a 'more tempered and pardonable pride' than Sir Walter, and she is biased enough to see the engagement as 'a most unfortunate one' (26). However, the next sentence immediately shows us that Austen has switched to adopt a sincere, unequivocal voice to explain the sound rationale of Lady Russell:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend himself, and no hopes of attaining affluence...would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she grieved to think of! (26-7)

Lady Russell's stance is, in fact, not entirely wrong or irrational. Lady Russell's *motive* for disliking Wentworth may originate from a deep-rooted class snobbery. As she shares with Sir Walter the same ideological 'prejudices on the side of ancestry' (11), Wentworth must be slighted for he has nothing to recommend him except himself. The love of 'decorum', 'good-breeding' and traditional manners can only deepen her suspicion of Wentworth being a Byronic, 'dangerous character' due to his quick proposal, 'sanguine temper, fearlessness of mind' (27). Though Lady Russell can be biased in her motives, we must not underestimate a subject who is described

by Austen as 'benevolent, charitable', 'rational and consistent' and has a practical and 'cultivated mind'. Her *rationale* against this engagement is actually founded on an accurate assessment of the couple's situation. Anne Elliot is 'so young' (only nineteen) and 'known to so few' (which means she may live to regret this choice). Wentworth is, strictly speaking, a 'stranger'. Instead of true love, it might be infatuation. Added are the concrete obstacles that Sir Walter gives no support to aid the marriage, and Wentworth himself is, at that time, not even employed. His profession is generally regarded by all to be uncertain, unsteady and unprofitable—if not for the war, nobody would believe that a man in the navy can rise to sudden prosperity. (In *Mansfield Park*, William Price laments his slow promotion to Fanny). Objectively speaking, the engaged couple will be marked by a long period of separation with only occasional meetings and Wentworth only has his bold words to support his declaration that he will 'become rich one day'. Moreover, his habits may not be extravagant, but they are certainly not frugal—'he had been lucky in his profession, but spending freely, what had come freely, had realized nothing' (27). With this kind of rational calculation, it may be logical to deduce that the engagement can only trap a naïve lady in 'a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence' (ibid). The engagement can be wearing for the long-awaited promotion and money may never come, and it can only produce anxiety for fear of human inconstancy. As a result, this 'rational and consistent' lady has 'deprecat[ed] the connexion in every light'.

It is in this light that we can see that Anne Elliot is a subject who has made a conscientious decision as she tries to compromise her self-interest, the interest of the Other and the duty to the (m)Other. It is a confused moment as the subject is under many forms of pressure: Wentworth's expectation, her given promise, Lady Russell's concern, the misrecognition of the Self. Bernard Williams best describes the problem of making a big decision in this way,

being an agent, has a double character. On the one side, it consists in taking council with oneself, weighing the for and against and doing the best one can to foresee the order of means and ends. On the other hand, it is to make a bet on the unknown and the incomprehensible and to take a risk on a terrain that remains impenetrable to you.¹²

¹² Bernard Williams *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 19.

In the story, Austen tells us that the subject has taken council with herself and made a bet on the unknown. Anne is said to have retracted her promise because of her age and disposition ('young and gentle'), because of her trust in Lady Russell ('she had always loved and relied on' Lady Russell, 27). However, if we examine the novel in detail, we can notice that Anne Elliot's decision is not due to direct, causative persuasion (as Wentworth and many critics see it). In addition to Sir Walter's financial reticence, Lady Russell's voice, and Wentworth's 'unbending' arguments, we can also find the conscientious agent's own voice that has confused itself. The subject forms a vague idea of action by accepting the advisor's rationale. From Anne's later reflection, we can see that Anne Elliot has, from the beginning, disregarded Lady Russell's ideological motive (don't choose Wentworth for he is a nobody). But Anne Elliot has endorsed the soundness of Lady Russell's judgement, i.e. the engagement is 'indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it' (27). During this process, Anne Elliot also adds *her own voice* that leads to a concrete decision: 'But it was not a merely selfish caution, under which she acted...Had she not imaged herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up' (28). This altruistic discourse comes undoubtedly from Anne Elliot for it is unselfish, self-sacrificing. It places her lover's interest above all else (in contrast to Lady Russell's attempt to place Anne's manifest interest and the latent gentry-class interest above everything). It is interesting that the subject has intuitively sensed that Lady Russell's advice can be a form of 'selfish caution'. While the story urges readers to take the view that 'the love for Lady Russell' forms the ground for Anne's decision, a closer examination of the novel tells us that this love is not the ultimate reason: the conscientious subject will still refuse to give up her own feelings if not for 'his good'. In this light, we can narrow down the subject's concern to three factors. Instead of placing Sir Walter's displeasure, Wentworth's portionless origin, or Lady Russell's love in the foreground, we can notice that 'discretion', 'the customary opinion on (long) engagement', and 'altruism' are the three frameworks that prompt the subject to make up her mind.

By 'discretion' and the 'customary belief on engagement', we can see that Anne has accepted the rational deduction and the social imperatives at that time, i.e. a man

in the navy can take a long time to reach prosperity, and a long engagement with no certainty of consummation is an irrational choice. Lady Russell accurately tells us that a relationship without financial support can only bring 'a youth-killing dependence', and will only bring 'certain immediate wretchedness' (29). And Mrs Croft and Mrs Musgrove's unanimous dislike of a quick engagement implies that it is a consensual view at that time. An uncertain engagement is the last thing one should recommend to young people. It is 'unsafe' and unwise' (231). In this light, it shows us that Anne Elliot does not love Lady Russell so much that she acts in accordance with her voice immediately. Anne Elliot is not an unthinking subject at the age of nineteen, her action bespeaks a double effort to listen to Lady Russell's claims, as well as to heed, subconsciously, her *legitimate self-interest* (i.e. she will not commit herself to something that is 'indiscreet', 'improper', 'hardly capable of success' 27). That is the reason why she cannot, and 'did not blame Lady Russell' (29). In fact, she has actively inverted Lady Russell's argument (self-protection, selfish caution) for her own use and assimilates it 'Anne Elliot style' to a 'self-sacrificial' project.

The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his* advantage, was her chief consolation. (28)

It is in this way that we feel the maskedness of the human mind can play fatal tricks in the moment of urgent decisions. Austen has not portrayed Anne Elliot as a moral hypocrite who solves the clash between the moral outlook and the subject's particular interest by speaking one thing and intending another. So why Anne Elliot can turn her legitimate self-interest into an 'altruistic belief' to justify her act is an intriguing question. Anne Elliot is portrayed as a subject who genuinely believes, at that time, that it is for the other's own good that she practices this 'self-denying', 'sacrificial' act. As Anne shifts Lady Russell's (snobbish) argument to fight a different battle, it can only show us that Anne Elliot ultimately stands for a conscientious subjectivity who must evolve around moral signifiers ('consulting his good even more than her own', 'for his advantage' 28) instead of impulsive feelings, or class ideology. With this shift, the subject actively creates a new reason to support her act. The *first cause* of her decision is to 'protect' Wentworth's welfare. Austen

particularly notes that this altruistic ‘chief consolation’ (28) is what drives Anne Elliot to give him up.

The subject soon learns to regret its decision. In *Persuasion*, Austen reveals to us the volatile nature of persuasion and self-persuasion as Anne Elliot shifts her perspective *three* times in the novel, each time re-reading her choice made eight and a half years ago. Owing to the unendurable pain at home, Anne Elliot soon shifts her position for the first time. Anne is ‘nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight’ (5). In her retrospective consideration, Anne Elliot laments her continuous suffering because of one decision. With no change of environment, Anne Elliot’s attachment and regrets have ‘for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth’. And the loss of her ‘life’ or her ‘self’ is characterized by ‘an early loss of bloom and spirits’, with a ‘lasting effect’ (28). Austen tells the readers how the subject quickly forgets its previous, altruistic rationale. The choice is now seen to be an inauthentic decision, and Anne Elliot accuses herself of making that choice out of docile obedience. This change helps heighten the readers’ understanding of the corrigibilist view of agency. Anne Elliot first believes that her ‘heroic action’ of giving up Wentworth follows the ideal of impersonal, noble claims (to sacrifice pleasure for some greater goal). Seven years later, readers can note that this same subject now perceives her decision as a conservative action, and she reads herself as a mere puppet with the aim of conforming to the Other’s advice. ‘She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing’ (27). The deed is now seen not so much as *her* own act as an act predetermined by the Other for her. And this view has drastically reduced the subject’s responsibility for its action. Speight suggests that the subject’s retrospective examination on the ‘motivation’ and the ‘why’ of its action often lead the subject to see a ‘givenness’ that precedes the subject’s choice. Though Anne Elliot says she does not blame herself and Lady Russell, her words suggest that she believes she is acting without deliberation for she ‘has been guided by [Lady Russell]’, ‘she had been forced into prudence’ (30). In a rebellious attempt to question Lady Russell’s judgement, Anne Elliot cooks up a hypothetical situation as a means of refuting Lady Russell’s past influence: *if* any young person were to apply to Anne for counsel, they would never receive such counsel from her (29). The

next sentence shows us that the subject now turns to another extreme to endorse a 'romantic sovereignty'. Anne Elliot performs a new act of self-persuasion:

[Anne] was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession,....she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it (29).

With this *imaginary* romantic subject-position, Anne thinks she should embrace a radical stance by abandoning all normative weighing of circumstances, family opinion, and financial concerns for the sake of 'Love'. Anne Elliot believes that she should favor 'warm attachment' and 'a cheerful confidence in futurity'. Discarding the altruistic mask, Anne Elliot reads her decision as a result of calculative deduction—which is now seen to be an 'over-anxious caution', an 'insult' to exertion and a 'distrust' of Providence (30). Though many critics selectively consider this revised position as the ultimate message of *Persuasion*, Austen does not give such an unambiguous view. While Anne Elliot believes, at this stage, that romance should come first in her (imaginary) regime, this decision has *never* been executed. In the heyday of Anne's (imaginary) 'romantic sovereignty', the advice she gives to Captain Benwick is that he should control his sentiments and temper his feelings with reason. Secondly, Austen has subtly endeavored to negate the idea of romantic sovereignty with a subplot. Fanny Harville is, in fact, not unlike another Anne Elliot for they have both fallen in love with poor sailors (the only difference is that Fanny Harville has not retracted her promise). Fanny Harville represents the heroine that Anne Elliot imagines she would like to be. Fanny keeps waiting for Benwick:

They had been a year or two waiting for fortune and promotion. Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great, —promotion too, came at *last*; but Fanny Harville did not live to know it. She had died the preceding summer, while he was at sea. (96)

In this little episode, Austen's italicized word ('promotion and money come at *last*') shows how difficult it can be for a sailor to become prosperous (which justifies Lady Russell's or the society's general belief). This story lauds the grandeur of the romantic will to love against all odds, but it also demonstrates the downside of an uncertain engagement. Austen implies to us that suffering, or death is, ironically, the reward of a romantic heroine.

At this stage, Anne Elliot has taken a liking to Captain Benwick for they both suffer immensely due to their blighted love affairs. They both secretly prize themselves for their faith in Love, they both have a 'sorrowing heart' (97). However, there ends the similarity—for hereafter, Austen hierarchizes her subjects in order to tell her readers who is the romantic subject, and who is not; and then Austen further reverses the arbitrary boundary between a romantic subject and an unromantic subject. If a romantic subject in the nineteenth century is defined by placing priority on a particular notion of Love (a faithful and ever lasting commitment) or by favoring discourses on Love (poems, novels, laments, dialogues), an unromantic subject is less engaged in the intensive pursuit of the signifiers of Love. It is capable of focusing on other symbols, even though its interest in Love may be as deep as the romantic subject. Austen's story tells us that, while the romantic man is but an impulsive person who loves intensely but shortly, the unromantic subject *is* often the one who turns out to be genuinely romantic for it is able to keep a faithful commitment to the Other.

In the novel, Anne Elliot is deliberately portrayed as a quiet, unromantic subject. Anne has 'never alluded' to the discourse of Love or her feelings, so 'no one knows its constancy or its change' (29). After the Wentworth affair, Austen foregrounds the repressed silence of Anne Elliot. Her life is to evolve around the laws of the Other. Austen describes the state of Anne's nonbeing as a 'nobody'. The subject's suppression of her voice is completed by her desire to be useful' in order to posit its identity in the symbolic and social zone:

To be claimed as a good, though in an improper style, is at least better than being rejected as no good at all; and Anne, glad to be thought of some use, glad to have any thing marked out as a duty,...readily agreed to stay [and accompanied Mary]. (33)

However, in those arenas, Anne still fails bitterly as a 'Subject' for its enunciating position does not adhere to the paternal worship of power and wealth. Anne represents the way in which women can, like men, be oedipalized enough to enter into the social Symbolic; however, its feminine position cannot be fully assimilated into the system. While the masculine position pushes the subject to be object-fied by Symbols and the worship of Phallus (money, sex, power), there is no feminine

equivalent to the 'highly prevalent symbol' provided by the phallus (S3 176).¹³ In the story, Elizabeth Elliot represents the way in which a woman can be fully socialized (oedipalized) to identify completely with masculine values. Hence, her enunciating position is unfeminine and she can take her role as an object in the (substitutable) signifying chain. In the story, Austen says Elizabeth can treat all baronets from A to Z as her equal in the search for one on whom to bestow her feelings. Eventually, it is the inequality of those baronets that fails her, instead of her having any irreplaceable affection towards Mr Elliot. For Anne, who is never sheltered by any total identification with phallic values (Wealth, paternal, familial structure), her enunciating position is foregrounded by a homeless nothingness in the domestic and social regime. At 'home' or in Mary's house, Anne performs for the Other in order to consummate their happiness in a country dance,

[Anne] played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having...no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of....Mr and Mrs Musgrove's fond partialities for their own daughters' performance, and total indifference to any other person's, gave her much more pleasure for their sakes, than mortification for her own. (46-7)

If Anne suffers her first death in failing to identify fully with Wealth or Glory (which affirms her nonbeing status at home), she has suffered her second death after the blighted love affair. This is confirmed by the words of Mary,

'Captain Wentworth is not very gallant by you, Anne, though he was so attentive to me. Henrietta asked him what he thought of you, when they went away; and he said, 'You were so altered he should not have known you again' (60).

And from that time onwards, Anne Elliot's nonbeing is dominated by a total silence to her real feelings or thoughts. This 'deep mortification' leads her to a lifelessly

¹³ Lacan points out that the 'feminine position' is peculiar in two senses: first of all, it does not necessarily refer to the biological sex, but to a special position in the symbolic order. While no subject exists before the symbolic realm, the feminine position does not yield completely to the process of oedipalization. The male position can identify with the Phallus and the father-figure, but the feminine position is required to identify with the mother, and mediated through that in order to identify with the oedipal father. In this extralinguistic identification with the non-symbolic (m)Other, a 'woman' becomes an Other for herself as she is also an Other for men (Ec 732). Secondly, due to this extralinguistic identification/knowledge, women are capable of enjoying a specifically non-symbolic feminine *jouissance*. As this *jouissance* is non-symbolic, hence the feminine subject can feel it but does not know it has experienced it (for, in the Lacanian context, all information must be processed through symbols in order to be known). The 'Woman' can enjoy wholeness in being, however, it does not know/feel wholeness for this is neither known nor representable to the subject.

‘new’ life. She ‘rejoiced that she had heard them. They were of sobering tendency; they allayed agitation; they composed, and consequently must make her happier’ (61). Austen emphatically tells the readers that Anne’s silent composure never betrays any romantic consciousness. Not even Lady Russell knows that Anne still loves Wentworth.

On the other hand, Benwick retires to the shore to read romantic poetry and devote himself to sadness or death-associated thoughts. This man of feeling is loudly interested in melancholic ideas or expressions. In the face of Anne, Benwick ‘repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness’ (100). After listening to Anne Elliot’s encouraging words on his need to read essays, Captain Benwick is grateful for Anne’s kindness. But he is determined to remain sad, he attends to Anne’s words

with a shake of the head, and sighs which declared his little faith in the efficacy of any book on grief like his. (101)

This ‘self-persuading’ attempt to refuse happiness is typical of a romantic subject, who believes that its emotional fixity can go beyond the mechanism of changes, substitution in the signifying practice. In her novels, Austen has subverted this belief again and again by showing the potency of the signifiers to produce a new subjectivity and reform feelings. Catherine Morland is otherized by gothic novels to produce gothic sentiments, Marianne Dashwood reforms her romantic subjectivity with new readings. Benwick’s self-persuading doomedness turns out to be unnecessary, for after reading a book or two named by Anne, Benwick begins to find ‘something very fine’ in them (131).

In *Persuasion*, Austen proceeds to *reverse* the belief that the romantic lover can love the longest. The romantic subject turns out to be a ‘fickle’ lover (at least Captain Harville sees Benwick in that way). Though the romantic Benwick keeps talking and reading about incurable melancholy, the romantic’s melancholy can in fact be easily cured paradoxically because of its romantic impulse for articulation. The romantic—with an ‘affectionate heart’—must talk to someone of his sadness (167). Hence, Austen’s story highlights the self-defeating nature of the romantic’s ‘eternal desolation’ as Austen foregrounds the way in which a romantic yearns for communication. When the subject talks, the subject will fall in love again for the

signifying practice always allows (metonymic, sliding) substitution to take place. In the novel, Austen has typecast the romantic as a self-misrecognizing 'eternal lover' in contradistinction to the fact that his affection slides *easily* and is highly transferable. While the affair between Wentworth and Anne Elliot belongs to a typical whirlwind romance, the groundwork of Benwick's new affair is an undignified one—it is a 'situational love'. Louisa Musgrove and Benwick do not fall in love at first sight, they do not admire each other. Anne Elliot guesses a great deal about 'Where could have been the attraction? The answer soon presented itself. It has been in situation' (166-7). Austen even leads her readers to see that, from Anne's retrospection, Benwick has also been interested in Anne ('some dawning of tenderness toward herself' 167). So Louisa Musgrove is, in fact, his *second* attachment after the death of Fanny Harville. As Benwick talks so much of his suffering, Anne notes that.

any tolerably pleasing young woman who had listened and seemed to feel for him, would have received the same compliment. He had an affectionate heart. He must love somebody. (167)

On the other hand, Austen has moulded her unromantic lovers into silent subjects; and silence has succeeded in preserving the strength and intensity of their emotions. By barring the Symbolic in the emotive realm, the subject blocks the possibility of sliding or metonymic substitution from taking place. The subject's silence in the socio-symbolic realm can only push it to sediment any feelings of Love to become a 'Thing'. In the Lacanian context, the feminine position's failure to identify with the paternal realm leads to its nonbeing and the possibility of a nonsymbolizable *jouissance*; and it is precisely in this unspeakable *jouissance* that any subject occupying the feminine position can constitute the 'impossible Thing at the heart of the subject'. 'There is in effect something radically unassimilable to the signifier' (S3 179). As Lacan describes it, this Thing-like *jouissance* is an 'ineffable, stupid existence' (E 194). Austen's story reveals to us how these inexpressive, 'stupid, ineffable' feelings can best preserve love in the passage of time. It becomes a real 'Thing' in the subject's identity. If we locate the permanency of Love in terms of Thingness and its non-discursivity, we can see that Harville and Anne's conversation has completely missed the point by placing love in relation to gender.

The famous discussion between Harville and Anne shows a misplaced focus on the influence of 'nature' or 'nurture' on men and women's attitude to love.¹⁴ In the story, a long lasting commitment is preserved not by discourses/expectations on love, but by death-like silence (a non-imagistic, nonverbal fixation that defies the robust exchange of the Symbolic or the narcissistic energetics in the imaginary). The main issue is that sex or gender behavior does not matter. Austen has arranged both her male and female subjects to love deeply. Both protagonists are faithful in the novel, though, in Wentworth's case, it is an unintentional one. A silent love actually has the longest duration, with a powerful pulsional force. Being asymbolic and inexpressive, this love is like a fixated Thing, full of pain-filled enjoyment, mediated through the body, 'half agony, half hope' (237), with a heart that is 'too full', or breath that is 'too much oppressed' (235).

In the meantime, Austen shows us that her heroine's view changes for a second time. In contradiction to the subject's previous 'romantic' belief, this change is directed towards reality and the 'business' nature of engagement. In the house of the Musgroves, Anne Elliot filters her new perspective through the voice of the Other. After listening to the 'powerful whisper' between Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft, Anne Elliot finds 'an unexpected interest' in their conversation. Mrs Musgrove is talking, in a business-like manner, to Mrs Croft about the marital arrangements of Henrietta and Charles Hayter. In the novel, Mrs Croft's viewpoint is represented as reliable—for she is an able subject, with 'good humor'. 'Whenever she spoke at all, it was very sensibly' (230). Her independent, practical but romantic spirit has led her to marry Admiral Croft after a brief acquaintance. She has successfully traveled through continents to enjoy herself and be with her husband, and she can actually give 'the reins a better direction' than Admiral Croft in driving the carriage (92). On

¹⁴ Harville suggests that women are fickle by nature (which leads many feminists to correctly note the misogynic tradition in literary history). Anne refutes his argument by suggesting men love less by means of nurture/influences (environmental changes, 'exertion', 'business'). Harville contradicts Anne by saying that he is against the nature theory ('I will not allow it to be more man's nature than woman's to be inconstant' 233), but he proceeds to go back and reinforce the nature theory by drawing up an analogy between the body and the depth of love (men are stronger, they have deeper love). Anne refutes this nature theory by playing back the analogy to Harville—a man lives a shorter life, so his love is likewise shorter. She brings him back to the nurture/influence theory again—men forget their love soon because they are busy, 'because neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own' (233). The following discussion is famous: the relationship between literature and gender behavior/expectation.

the question of marriage, Mrs Croft pays equal attention to love and practicality; but she emphatically points out that she 'would rather have young people settle on a small income at once, and have to struggle with a few difficulties together, than be involved in a long engagement', 'or an uncertain engagement....To begin without knowing that at such a time there will be the means of marrying,...all parents should prevent [it] as far as they can' (230-1). Austen tells us that Anne responds to these words with 'a nervous thrill all over her' as the two ladies' opinions agree with her past decision, though readers can notice that they employ totally different arguments. While Anne first retracts from her promise for '*his* advantage' (28), she switches to endorse the belief that 'she should have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement' (29). After this short conversation, Austen foregrounds to us that Anne becomes uncertain at once, and she looks instinctively at Wentworth to observe how he would take this view. At this stage, Austen openly welcomes the corrigibilist approach in opinion changes. It is a view that accepts inconsistency, or even an apparent capriciousness as the subject is swayed by the voice of the Other, or a change of situation. Mrs Musgrove says, 'what I said at first I never could consent to, but was afterwards persuaded to think might do very well' (230). The contextual, corrigibilist agency no longer leads the subject to focus on the original intention, or one single cause (Lady Russell); instead, it encourages the subject to re-read its conduct with a concrete understanding of the situatedness of 'I', its changing desire, its subjection to symbols and to the Other. In the words of Speight,

For the corrigibilist, accounting for the justification and motivation of action involves such inherently retrospective and social elements, a voluntarist or causalist might reasonably ask here just how it is that an agent can be said to assure [herself] that [she] is 'in' [her] action so as to have any coherent sense of practical identity at all. Such an agent could have no prospective certainty about the justification of [her] actions or immediate certainty about [her] desires such as the causalist/voluntarist view claims to offer.¹⁵

Simply put, as perspective changes, the subject cannot have a stable view of action, and neither can it have a stable view of 'me'. In this light, the split subject re-examines how the present situation stands, how just is the choice made, how much it is made by the subject herself. The subject's oscillation or uncertainty (due to 'no

¹⁵ Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* 5

prospective certainty') is no longer seen as spinelessness, but as a flexible sign that takes into account 'the motivation of action' which involves 'inherently retrospective and social elements' (ibid). At this point, Austen brings the subject to dialectically re-consider everything it once negated (i.e. it is unwise to heed Lady Russell's advice to retract; it is equally unwise to put romance over everything). In every way, the subject has 'no prospective certainty about the justification of her action' (5).

The third change of the subject actually mirrors what Hegel calls the 'overdevelopment of the conscience'. Anne Elliot's final interpretation has fully reconciled with her original choice—but from a totally different angle. Anne Elliot's final position reacts not to economic reasons, romantic desire, the voice of the Other or altruism. Instead, Anne Elliot says that she is 'glad' that she has endorsed an unreflective, empty Law (duty) even though she now knows that it is wrong. In the story, Austen uses direct speech to foreground the 'originality' of Anne's statement, i.e. Anne has come to this conclusion all by herself. Anne says she has tried to be 'impartial' 'to judge the right and wrong' (246). The conclusion is that

I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend.... To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides....But I mean, I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience....a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion (246).

This passage actually poses more questions instead of answering them. How can we make sense of Anne's statement? If we take Anne's retraction as a conscientious action (the subject favors its legitimate self-interest after weighing all claims), Anne's new defense of that decision as a 'conscientious', obedient action has redefined the nature of conscience. 'Conscience' is now no longer a self-authorizing ideal, but an unquestioning submission to an authoritative figure who occupies the 'parent'-position (which means that person can, in fact, bear no blood-relation to the subject). It is in this sense that I see Austen coincide with Hegel in noting that the final stage of the conscientious subject will end in the birth of the pure 'beautiful soul'. At the final stage of conscience, the subject 'oscillates hopelessly between

self-doubt derived from the reactions of others and its own self-certainty' (PS 575). Hence, the subject loses the self-legitimizing tendency it once had, and the dialectic between the universal and the particular begins anew. The subject rediscovers a secure viewpoint by equating the highest conscientious act with deeds done from purely abstract motives (moral duty). This pure conscience firmly locates the subject on a secure, correct footing—at the cost of forgetting its own feelings, self-interest, or even its personal approval. '[Conscience's] pure self, as an empty knowing, is something devoid of content and determination'. Like Antigone who feels she has to place ethics over her self interest, 'Duty' replaces individuality, and 'is turned outwards: duty is only a matter of words, and counts as a being-for-another' (PS §659, 400).

In this light, Anne has finally placed her past decision in an impregnable position—for she sees that it adheres to a moral ideal. She has done her duty to obey a parent-figure. It shows that the subject has overcome the tension between 'conscience' and 'rightness'. Anne Elliot clearly admits that Lady Russell is wrong, but in her retrospective recognition, she still thinks she *should* listen to Lady Russell's advice—out of a 'strong sense of duty'. 'Duty' is now an empty notion that does not require the subject's consent. As a result, Anne Elliot has come to this statement:

I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up (246).

Anne's final version simply disregards reality or the business nature of engagement, and insists that pure morality is all—in spite of the fact that she has been regretting this choice for seven years, and knows that the keeping of her engagement would have brought her happiness six years earlier. As 'self-certainty is the primary fact for conscience', the negation of this self-certainty makes Findlay foreground the harm of an empty conscience,

For the universal consciousness represented by other people the absolute certainty of conscience is essentially evil and hypocritical (PS 576).

In *Persuasion*, Austen has never examined how evil and hypocritical this empty conscience can be—for once again, this is but another discursive ideal in the subject's corrigible recognition, and bears little relevance to the present. Anne Elliot

only says she finds it a conscientious and dutiful act for her to obey Lady Russell *at that time*. In the novel, we must note that this fervor for ‘duty’ occurs *after* Anne Elliot has regained the heart of Wentworth, and she has actually given her consent to marry him again. In other words, this beautiful conscience is a luxurious ideal and can only emerge after the subject has secured her happiness. In terms of action, Anne Elliot at twenty-eight has chosen to adhere to her ‘private standard’ and marry Wentworth right away—without seeking the consent of anybody, or giving even half a thought on the question of ‘conscience’ or ‘duty’.

With the subject’s changing, corrigibilist agency, the subject is capable of re-examining the past, effecting changes to the present. By having flexible perceptions and responses, the subject can clarify or re-cognize its subject-positions as it grows (altruism, self-interest, romantic regrets, the business of reality, duty). In turn, the retrospective view of action does not merely point towards reflection, but to an immediate determination to react to these knowledges. In the case of Anne Elliot, Austen tells us that she has disidentified and reidentified with Lady Russell. And Anne may help Wentworth to overcome his prejudice against Lady Russell, as she herself has come round to accept her good-willed (though bad) advice. However, it is significant for us to know that while discursive identification may come and go, the subject can never resist the dumb reality (the Love-Thing), ‘the beyond of the signified’ (S7 54). Anne Elliot loves Wentworth, and no retrospection has succeeded in altering what is nonsymbolisable, or in fading that silent love.

* * *

Austen has anticipated Lacan’s question on the beautiful soul—‘What does she really want?’—with Wentworth’s puzzlement. From the very beginning of the novel, Wentworth denounces such docility and takes Lady Russell to be his ‘enemy’ (247). Austen notes that Wentworth is not deceived by Anne Elliot’s altruistic excuses, and he cannot forgive her for being so yielding to others (61). This judgement on Anne echoes Lacan’s belief that the empty, pure conscience seems to have anchored itself completely in ‘the field of the Other’ (S7 277). Lacan sees that the purely conscientious subject (Antigone) is subject-ified by a fixated signifier: for example, a word like ‘duty’, is ‘ineffaceable, that is, from the moment when the emergent signifier freezes it like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations.

What is, is, and it is to this...surface, that the unshakeable, unyielding position' of the subject is 'fixed' (S7 279). Austen portrays Wentworth as a very conscientious subject; but its conscience upholds a moral outlook that insists on the validity of acting solely from its own desires and moral consciousness. Hence, Wentworth condemns Anne as a weak, unthinking, unreliable character—who is likely to be influenced by any authority that tunes into her fanciful notion of duty. 'It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it' (88). The 'effect of over-persuasion' must be a 'weakness' (61). In the novel, Wentworth's query of Anne's conduct is like Lacan's question on a subject who

is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents [her] for the other, and through this pinning [she] is loaded with a symbolic mandate, [she] is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. The point is that this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary: since its nature is performative, it cannot be accounted for by reference to the 'real' properties and capacities of the subject (SO 113).

In the story, Wentworth stands for the voice of self-made autonomy, questioning how a subject can allow itself to be 'pinned down' by a signifier to exist for the Other, how a creature can forget her feelings to gain a place 'in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations' (ibid). As a result, this subject is singularly incapable of understanding why a subject's action can be related to 'the field of the Other' instead of to the 'real properties and capacities of the subject' (ibid). In *Persuasion*, Austen has destroyed Wentworth's illusory autonomy by revealing his Otherness. If Anne's position is related to the Other, Austen has highlighted to us that Wentworth is equally governed by an 'excentric agency'.

An 'excentric agency' can be traced back to the birth of the subject. From the moment the subject enters into the Imaginary and the Symbolic stage, the subject builds its 'self' through mirror and linguistic reflection. Through these unified constructs, the subject conveniently forgets that its 'real self' is now excenterized, and is dependent on the other (the reflective mirror in the wardrobe, or in people's gazes, or language, or ideology). The subject mistakenly believes that it has a unifying self, while it is actually the Other motivating, pushing the subject to take up

certain views or tasks. With this Otherized subjectivity, the subject is not a homogeneous creature. Lacan teaches us that a subject is like a system with 'porous' boundaries that manifests the influence of biological drives, ideal image, personal history, with multiple identification with various discourses. Hence, Lacan thinks that the analyst's task is to carefully listen to the 'particular language' of the subject. In the *Écrits*, he speaks of a 'language that seizes desire at the moment in which it is humanized' (E 81). This language is 'absolutely particular to the subject' (ibid) for it contains a highly predictable pattern of repression and repetition.

If we are to investigate the ways of excentric agency, then we must engage with its two contradictory origins. First of all, agency comes with the subject's illusory *unity*: the subject, with the real me excenterized by the Other, thinks that it can resist any force with its (illusory) unifying image (the tycoons or stars' rebellious defiance of conventions, social custom etc). This agency is undesirable for it strengthens the imaginary 'me' instead of analyzing the truth: the subject as a product of the Other. Secondly, the subject can assert a resisting agency due to its *disunity*, its split identifications and particular language. Simply put, the subject is excenterized/constituted by ideology; however, it is capable of resistance for its personal history, or its particular language, does not agree with the dominant discourse (this is often the source of political resistance). In the words of Marshall W. Alcorn, the subject is produced by the Other, but it 'is not just another discourse system subjected to the effects of discourse colligation. It is a discourse system with its own particular properties; it is a discourse system driven by particular subject functions'.¹⁶ In the story, Austen's task is to dismantle the subject's (imaginary, univocal) unity and to highlight its conflictual stance. Wentworth's 'individualism' is shown to be entirely false: his life can never be more closely linked to the people around him. His motivation to be rich, his contempt of pliant women, his escape from Louisa, his love for Anne are all reactions to the Other and his past.

Persuasion explores the *first* feature of excentric agency by revealing to us that the subject attains (an imaginary) agency by thinking that he is the master of himself. However, Austen highlights to the readers that, beneath the mask of a unifying,

¹⁶ Alcorn, "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan through (and beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 31.

agentic Selfhood, Wentworth is a split subject constructed by the Other. In the first place, Wentworth's success manifests an audacious self-made project, so he often talks about the importance of 'fortitude and strength of mind' (88). Wentworth proves to be a conscientious, able hero who enjoys agency because of this 'unifying' selfhood. In comparison to Charles Hayter's mere words (little Walter should stop pestering Aunt Anne), Wentworth simply lifts Walter from Anne's neck (disregarding social conventions and the voice of Charles). While Austen leads us to admire Wentworth as a strong 'Man', she reveals to us that 'unifying' subjectivity is motivated by his feeling of being once hurt and 'ill-used' by the Elliots. At the beginning of the novel, we are told that Wentworth is in the landed gentry class (his brother is a curate of Monkford), but he is considered by Sir Walter to be 'a nobody'. Austen's narrative tells us that Wentworth feels 'himself ill-used by so forced a relinquishment.—He had left the country in consequence' (28). In this manner, he 'had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank' (29). As Anne Elliot's 'youth and bloom' are being eaten up by regret, the golden touch of prosperity gives Wentworth 'a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages' (61). In short, the subject's glorious 'unity' is a reaction to the Other's contempt. This 'Manhood' cannot delete the fact that the subject is pushed to otherize itself (seek Money), to identify with paternal values due to the contemptuous voice of the father.

Meanwhile, Wentworth is not the master of himself in the sense that the victory of his career can only heighten his split identification, instead of strengthening his unity. On the one hand, there is a defiant spirit questioning the existing paternal system, the superiority of class ancestry (represented by Sir Walter and Lady Russell, his 'enemy'). On the other hand, there is an equally strong desire to docilely enter into the respectability of that class, to align himself with the existing socialites. In this self-reflexive hatred of *and* identification with paternal values, the subject has constructed an ambivalent stance that bespeaks an observation of, dependence on and defiance of the Other. Captain Wentworth makes a 'distant bow' to Sir Walter and Elizabeth, and is acutely aware of how the Elliots respond to him (181). He has 'disdain in his eye', he remembers the 'insolence' of that class, but he is not offended by being 'pointedly' invited to a party (226-7). In other words, far from mastery, the

subject creates its 'Self' by stooping down and following the paternal decrees of the society (status, wealth, class manners). After the subject's success, it becomes certain of its value and begins to talk of unity and Manhood. However, as a subject can only recognize itself through the eyes of the Other, the subject is linked to the Other even though it may defy the Other. Owing to his personal history, Wentworth represents the way in which a subject can develop a 'particular language' to rebel against snobbish values ('the Elliot pride', 88); however, the subject never rebels enough to refute the paternal values or codes of that class. In fact, Wentworth's efforts are devoted to not only copying or conforming to that value, but to out-winning the class standard: by being wealthier, more well-mannered, with more 'air and appearance' than others (226). The subject cannot be more preoccupied by the Other at every moment.

The subject's self-division is not unknown to itself. Austen leads us to notice that Wentworth knows he is playing the *actor* and *spectator* to enact his rebel-conformist identity. In the story, his 'particular language' is denoted by a heightened self-reflexiveness of his masks. His first mask is to play the new role of a being 'rich, gullible Captain', and he shows a high degree of rebellious, ironic awareness in the midst of his performance. Austen's narrative helps foreground the contrast between the subject's critique of his self-division. Wentworth says he fully intends 'to settle as soon as he [can] be properly tempted' (61). 'Yes, here I am,...quite ready to make a foolish match. Any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking' (62). Focalized through the perspective of Mrs Croft, we know that Wentworth says this 'to be contradicted'. He is 'nice' and will not put up with inferiority (*ibid*). And often, through the perspective of Anne, Austen shows how Wentworth knows there is a gap between the enjoyment of his present state of being wealthy and recognized, and a disgust towards simple recognition based on wealth. He is surprised first by Elizabeth's friendly gesture, then,

Anne caught [Wentworth's] eye, saw his cheeks glow, and his mouth form itself into a momentary expression of contempt, and turned away, that she might neither see nor hear more to vex her. (227)

This self-alienating tendency is prominent in the subject's docile, yet disdainful identification with the upper gentry class. Instead of showing enthusiasm to diligently acquire class recognition (cp. Mr Elliot's 'object is to be established here

with all the credit and dignity which ought to belong to Sir Walter Elliot' 151), Wentworth reverts to a *discursive*, nostalgic identification with the poor old days. He talks about hardship and loneliness, his time with 'the Asp', 'the Laconia', his near-death experience. Another rebellious way to engage his new identity is on the level of a parodic conformism. Wentworth is perfectly aware of the fact that he is now a rich sailor on shore (61). He docilely observes the designated class habits, but he does it in a way that bespeaks his critical disidentification. 'A momentary expression' in his face, or 'a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth' (67) all show his critique in the midst of his conformist behavior and self-spectatorship. The split influences behind a unified, agentic 'Self' can be easily understood: Wentworth has learnt his lesson the hard way. To avoid being a nobody, the subject presents itself as a rebellious-conforming subject who is perfectly aware of the need to 'behave'. Hence, he can only afford to mask his expression in 'transient' 'indulgence of self-amusement' (ibid). Austen denotes that it is so well done that only one reader can decode this double consciousness—for only Anne Elliot can read his mind and detect these emotions. Through Anne's viewpoint, readers can perceive that Wentworth is acting in response to his own history, class constraints and social expectation—even though this 'Man' manifestly denies the power of the Other on him.

In refuting this (pseudo)mastery, *Persuasion* reveals the *second* feature of excentric agency, i.e. the subject's agency is not as self-motivated as it seems, for it is related to the Other. In this process, Austen demystifies the second mask of Wentworth as an agent with clear goals. Due to his particular experience, Wentworth insists that a respectful person must have a self-determining, individuated agency-in-and-for-itself (unitary, organic, autonomous). He enters into the novel with a clear desire to take action to erase his past. It is 'now his object to marry' (61), and he intends to love any 'nice' woman (other than Anne) who possesses 'a strong mind, with sweetness of manner' (62). Even though Wentworth has made such a strong intention to delete Anne's influence, Austen's story often brings us to notice that his bitter denial of Anne is highly inconsistent with his 'unconscious action', his emotional relatedness to her. Wentworth pointedly slights Anne, takes action to openly receive the love of two young women; but unconsciously, he directs his

attention to Anne from time to time. The moment Wentworth appears in Uppercross, he wants 'to avoid seeing Anne' (60); but 'he had enquired after her' out of some 'natural sensation of curiosity'. Their second meeting is characterized by Wentworth's willful intent to denigrate her influence. Anne is 'objectively' described to be 'so altered that he should not have known her again' (60). Hence, all subsequent meetings are deliberately emphasized by Austen to foreground the ex-lovers' 'perpetual estrangement' (64). They have 'no conversation' beyond 'the commonest civility'. With a 'cold', 'studied politeness', 'his ceremonious grace' simultaneously speaks and denies his being an embittered, angry lover.

However, Austen portrays that some incidents, some contingent, disruptive actions come in direct contrast to the subject's intention. And it is during those gaps that readers can see that the agent is not *that* self-determining. In fact, the contrast can be highly amusing: the subject's discursive representation of itself as a man with strong aims comes in direct contrast with the subject's emotive, disruptive, unthinking deeds, which bespeak the power of a *contingent*, excentric agency. All of a sudden, Wentworth's controlled agency is displaced by an explosive urge to act and react to the need for Anne. The first instance is Wentworth's taking away the child Walter from Anne's neck. The second instance features how Wentworth, with a clear aim to favor Louisa, keeps up an Anne-related conversation. His praise of independence is an unmistakable reaction against the 'weakness' of Anne Elliot. Upon hearing Louisa's account of the family, he inquires about Anne's refusal of Charles Musgrove. The third instance dramatizes the contrast between his behavioral indifference to Anne versus his perception of her fatigue, and his quick intervention to ask his sister to take Anne home with their carriage. '[W]ithout saying a word', he 'quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage' (91). Austen has typecast Wentworth as a hard-hearted judge ('condemning [Anne] for the past' *ibid*), yet she particularly highlights the fact that the agent's teleological or his deliberative action is often overthrown by the power of disruptive moments, in 'little circumstance' (91). The subject is *beside* himself, and merely emerges as a cluster of contingent consciousnesses which answer unthinkingly to his (true) desire. Austen's story indicates to us that these small incidents can best subvert the mythical autonomy in

the discourse of Individualism—where the Individual is presumed to be the controlling center of its speech, will or action.

While the subject can go beside himself to care for a person in some unexpected, disruptive moments, *Persuasion* tells us that love does not occur in this way. Love occurs *because* it is mediated through the third party. And *Persuasion* best illustrates the *third* feature of excentric agency as the subject is so driven by the Other that his desire is actually the desired object of the Other. In the story, the subject's 'lack' (of Anne) can be metonymically displaced and substituted by another object in the Symbolic chain (money, Henrietta and Louisa). Wentworth's momentary, self-contradictory urge to talk about or help Anne does *not* rouse his desire for her. The birth of his love is narrated as related to the rivaling appearance of the third party. And this burst of desire can be explained by Lacan in this way,

Desire...is human only to the extent that it is 'mediated' by the Desire of another directed toward the same object: it is human to desire what others desire, because they desire it. Thus, an object perfectly useless...can be desired because it is the object of other desires. Such a Desire can only be a human Desire, and human reality, as distinguished from animal reality, is created only by action that satisfies such Desires: human history is the history of desired Desires. (S1 176-177)

At Lyme, the entry of Mr Elliot immediately renews Wentworth's interest in Anne. Austen portrays the incident in this way,

A gentleman...stopped to give them way...Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of....It was evident that the gentleman...admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again' (104).

Incredible though it seems, the 'gaze' of Mr Elliot is actually what first causes Wentworth to 'look' at Anne Elliot again. And Austen describes how 'At Lyme, Wentworth had received lessons of more than one sort. The passing admiration of Mr Elliot *had at least roused him*' (242, emphasis added).

Eventually, *Persuasion* reveals to us the *fourth* characteristic of excentric agency, i.e. that this constitutional Otherness in-the-self is beyond unmasking. To the end of

the novel, the subject *cannot* know that his love is constructed by the desire of the third party. Wentworth believes his desire for Anne always comes from himself, or from Anne's admirable qualities—while the story makes us understand the way in which 'the dynamic triangulation of gaze' can accelerate the subject's desire.¹⁷ Wentworth's love is roused, thwarted and intensified by his refracted observation of Anne Elliot and Mr Elliot. It is further heightened by his knowing that he is trapped by the Louisa incident, and his being watched by the (hostile) Elliot family. As we have examined above, Wentworth's desire is first roused by his witnessing the admiration of Mr Elliot for Anne. In contrast to the 'eye' that presumes a unitary 'subject' position to impose judgement on others (which leads him to comment that Anne is 'altered' beyond recognition), the gaze is a 'dialectical bridge to self-recognition'.¹⁸ Wentworth is not lured by Anne's gaze, but lured by the gaze of *Mr Elliot* on Anne ('why does he look at her in that way?'). Hence he comes to 're-evaluate' her. The contrastive perception of Louisa's closed eyes (after the accident) can only kill his desire. Louisa's closed eyes and pale face become a mirror in which he sees (and resents himself for) his folly. In the second step, the birth of Wentworth's desire for one and the extinguishing of his admiration for the other are further complemented by his realization of his duty—to marry Louisa if she wants him. People's gaze can only madden Wentworth and make him feel like an object that has to fulfil a certain role. The gaze of the Harvilles makes Wentworth understand that 'he has entangled himself', 'he must regard himself bound to her' (243). Wentworth's desire for Anne is quickly intensified because, if he has to marry Louisa, Anne is now fast becoming a 'permanent lack' to him.

From that period his penance had become severe. He had no sooner been free from the horror and remorse attending the first few days of

¹⁷ In the context of Lacan, the difference between the eye and the gaze can be summarized by their different identifications. The eye foregrounds the 'I', the subject. 'The eye' presumes the person is active, autonomous, unitary, ready to impose laws. The eye occurs after the birth of the Subject after the Symbolic stage (after the subject has incorporated a set of Other's law and misrecognizes it as its own). On the contrary, the gaze exists at the primordial level, at the mirror stage for self-'objectification'/formation to take place, to see 'me' as an object. And everybody, in earnest hope of knowing what the mirror/the Other thinks of 'me' so as to posit its own identity, can react to the gaze in two different ways. First, it is lured by that gaze ('why does he look at me in that way?'), or second, it becomes resentful of it—for this mirrored-object(='me') perceived through the Other's gaze makes me feel a sense of estrangement, fear, shame (characterized by the statement: 'everybody is looking at me').

¹⁸ Ragland, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* 94.

Louisa's accident, no sooner begun to feel himself alive again, than he had begun to feel himself, though alive, not at liberty (242).

To divert people's gaze, Austen arranges that Wentworth play 'death' so as to kill Louisa and others's expectation. He is 'determined to leave Lyme, and await her complete recovery elsewhere. He would gladly weaken, by any fair means, whatever feelings or speculations concerning him might exist' (243). His release from Louisa due to her engagement directs him to Bath as quickly as possible.

However, in Bath, the subject encounters new problems that heighten his longing for Anne. The subject becomes split because of the 'triangulating politics' of gazing at others and self-gaze. In the shop in Milsom Street, the ladies' discussion on Anne's appearance and Mr Elliot ignites Wentworth's longing for Anne: 'Anne Elliot; very pretty, when one comes to look at her' (177). Through these ladies' eyes, Mr Elliot's competing, admiring gaze for Anne further augments Wentworth's desire. Mr Elliot is said to adore his cousin, 'he is always with [her]'. 'One can guess what will happen there...What a good-looking man!' (177). However, a self-gazing examination tells Wentworth that Mr Elliot's love can only thwart his chance of success. In other words, in the field of the scopic drive, the subject watches the others (Elliot and others) watch the desired object (Anne). The subject comes to yearn for this desired object due to the dialectics of desire (desire of the Other is the desire of the Self), but it also feels oppressed because of this competitive game. In the meantime, the subject is further tormented by the onset of a new identity crisis—owing to the power of the Other's gaze on him. Wentworth watches the others (the hostile Elliots) watch him, and comes to feel insecure under the power of the Other's potent gaze. Lady Dalrymple sees Wentworth as an attractive object ('a very fine young man indeed! More air than one often sees in Bath.' 188). And Sir Walter immediately replies, 'A bowing acquaintance...Captain Wentworth of the navy'. Lady Dalrymple's gaze on his figure and Sir Walter's gaze on his rank can only make Wentworth feel uncomfortable. Instead of occupying a subject-position, Wentworth is now like an object, split from his self-reflexive position and comes to understand that he is being admired or despised because of predetermined (ideological) notions—over which he can have no control. The gazing process strategically objectifies the subject as an entity to be juxtaposed against an

ideologized ranking system. And the subject is trapped in the relational context of looking at the self through the Other through ideology (comely/ugly; navy/royalty/gentry). Wentworth's anxiety is doubly roused by the fact that Anne is being surrounded by all the people who are delighted to put him down. Wentworth's sudden, early departure from the concert is the result of jealousy as well as a defensive withdrawal due to an insecure identity: discomfort and a fear of inferiority under the potent gaze of the Other.

Austen complicates this dynamic triangulation of the gaze with more refracted acoustics and refracted discourses. If we compare the present chapter 22 and 23 with the cancelled chapter, we can easily discover that Austen has planned the reunion scene in a more indirect, contingent, mediated way. The new chapter is full of subtle chaos, double references, double talk, and double letter writing. In the cancelled chapter, Wentworth is the messenger who directly addresses Anne on behalf of Admiral Croft (who hears the rumor that Anne is going to marry Mr Elliot, and fears that he might have to move out from the Kellynch-hall soon). Anne's denial directly hastens the reunion between the lovers. In the new version, the process of reunion is full of insinuation, alienation, interruption, contingencies. The immediate cause that provokes Wentworth's writing of the letter is deliberately embedded within two sets of mediated, refracted discourses: the dialogue between Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft refractively mirrors his love story (uncertain engagement), and the discussion between Anne and Harville helps foreground the ideal image of the 'sailor-lover'.

While the self attributes to itself a(n illusory) sense of Oneness, Austen intends that the voice of the Other helps desubjectify the subject through the 'acoustic mirror' (to use Kaja Silverman's term). To explain this concept clearly, the 'acoustic mirror' is somewhat like the mirror in the mirror stage to dismantle, excenterize the infant's primordial oneness. Kaja Silverman suggests that the fundamental acoustic mirror is the maternal voice, its function is to instruct the baby, and force the baby to know that it is but an object to the (m)Other, and subsequently, to be Otherized by the Other, to become the Other. She describes it in this way:

The mother is the first language teacher, commentator and storyteller—the one who first organizes the world linguistically for the child, and first presents it to the Other. The maternal voice also plays a crucial part during the mirror stage defining and interpreting the reflected image, and 'fitting' it to the child. Finally, [the maternal

voice] provides the acoustic mirror in which the child first hears itself.¹⁹

In the story, the subject, after listening to the voice of the (m)Others (Mrs Croft and Mrs Musgrove), feels as if it has been placed under a masterful acoustic mirror, and the maternal voice can only destroy the subject's unitary image. Austen has anticipated Silverman's Lacanian theory, and designated an indirect acoustic mirroring process so as to pulverize the subject's self-centeredness, and let the subject have an refracted 'acoustic gaze' of itself through the voice of the (m)Other. Mrs Croft and Mrs Musgrove's words send Wentworth's self-image/past behavior back to him, make him hear himself, and force him to negate his past—i.e. the dissolution of the engagement is right. Needless to say, it is an extremely alienating (and frustrating) experience for the subject to hear his own history being refractively thrown back to him and he can only sit in front of a desk re-gazing at his past behavior like an object—while (over)hearing the conversation of absolutely innocent parties, and pretending to be busy. Wentworth's 'pen ceased to move,...he turned round the next instant to give a look—one quick, conscious look at [Anne]' (231) when he overhears Mrs Croft's words. As the mirror/(m)Other can organize the 'world of speech and self image for her child', 'the mother's discourse...can give a direction to the child's desire'.²⁰ In the novel, Wentworth is immediately Otherized/resubjectified by this refractive maternal discourse and its consensual distrust of risky engagement. The voice of the (m)Other objectifies the subject, and the subject's world is being 'linguistically re-organized' (as Silverman puts it). These acoustic images alienate Wentworth from his remaining self-complacency and rouse his desire for Anne to a new height. He suddenly realizes that he has wronged Anne, and he wants to be the ideal 'eternal lover' in the discourse of the Other (Harville).

In that light, writing, instead of being an active exercise, can be a passive, Otherized response. Instead of being a romantic lover who takes initiatives in expressing his emotions, Wentworth's letter is actually a refracted discourse, a result of passive objectification, frustration, and alienation under the potent linguistic-acoustic mirror-gaze of the Other. The subject's self-image is suddenly upset by the

¹⁹ Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 100.

²⁰ Ellie Ragland 'The Relation between the Voice and the Gaze' in *Reading Seminar VII* 191.

discourse of the Other, hence erasing every trace of its original position. In the story, Wentworth's 're-interpretation' of his behavior in love ('I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant' 237) shows the adoption of a new 'subject'-position after the acoustic mirroring process. In opposition to his discursive mask ('any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking' 62), or his actual conduct (accepting two women's attention at the same time), Wentworth desires to be the desired ideal of the Other—i.e. the faithful, eternal sailor-lover in Harville's discourse. Hence one must not be surprised to find the new 'subject' has no memory of his old position. In contrast to Wentworth's previous statement that '[Anne is] so altered he should not have known [her] again' (60), he later says to Anne that 'to my eye you could never alter' (243), 'Anne smiled, and let it pass'.

* * *

As desire always comes in disguise, and needs to be disguised on public occasions, desire is often expressed, mediated and postponed by the subject through indirect, particular, contextual ways. In the novel, the subject's particular way of expressing its desire goes beyond a Lacanian sense of excentric (totally Otherized) agency. Austen has re-written the new chapter to concretize a new concept of action. In contrast to the Individualist's autonomous, straightforward, voluntaristic action, or a totally excentric (self-othering) action, the new chapter is characterized by a 'particularistic agency' that is indirect, confused and haphazardly contingent, co-authored by the subject, the Other, and the context. It neither expresses the subject's wish in its naked form (hence non-egocentric), nor does it conform docilely to the voice of the environment, or the Other (hence not totally excentric). In the second half of the novel, Austen foregrounds the fact that the subject has now come round to recognize its desire, but the subject is constantly frustrated by mundane circumstances, environmental constraints, social customs, the law of the father, the eye of public surveillance. However, in spite of all these forces, the subject is still capable of exerting an actively disguised, contingent agency in passive circumstances.

In the novel, the moment Anne sees Wentworth in Bath, she immediately wants to rush out to see him. And she does it in the name of examining the weather: 'She

now felt a great inclination to go to the outer door; she wanted to see if it rained' (175). On another occasion, in the concert hall, Anne wants to leave her circle of friends and talks to Wentworth. In order to do so, she tries to place 'herself much nearer the end of the bench than she had been before'—'by some other removals, and a little scheming of her own'. Anne has the amazing success of placing 'herself at the very end of the bench before the concert closed' (189). She calculates what time to talk to him, observes his looks, guesses his moods ('He looked grave...She thought of her father—of Lady Russell. Could there have been any unpleasant glances?' 190). Her subtle yet boldly public invitation to lure Wentworth to sit down beside her nearly succeeds—if not for the advance of Mr Elliot. In the house of the Musgroves, Captain Harville's argument with Anne on the relation between faithfulness and sex differences culminates in Anne's disguised but bold expression of her love towards Wentworth: 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone' (235). While this statement serves as a powerful defense of her sex, Anne's strong words function as an unmistakable double talk to Wentworth after noticing his pen 'has fallen down'. In the meantime, Austen arranges that Wentworth has likewise double-written a letter to her. The letter 'while supposed only to be writing only to Captain Benwick, he had also been addressing her!' (237). Through the act of double talk and double writing, Austen shows how the (Otherized) subjects can always work with circumstances and through the Other to do what they want (even though what they want is influenced by the desire of the Other). In turn, the couple can manage to have a reciprocal recognition of their particularity and a haphazardly-found communicative 'freedom'.

This haphazard, convoluted, particularistic agency can be best illustrated using this example: in the final reunion episode, Austen again postpones the union between the couple by arranging an interruptive entry of 'Charles, Mary, Henrietta', and Mrs Musgroves (238). Anne is forced to respond to their requests. The joy and awareness of the subject are covered, buried, and eluded by mundane consciousness, discussion, concerns and causal answers. However, Anne can still find her way to exert a contingent agency, to resist the constraints of the Other. Mrs Musgrove kindly suggests that Anne should 'go home directly' (238). Anne instinctively knows that

this can only thwart her wish to speak to Wentworth at that critical moment. Anne immediately switches to a contingent scheme to tell Mrs Musgrove to bring Wentworth to Elizabeth's party. Mrs Musgrove's careless reply ('Harville is quite engaged...and Captain Wentworth the same, I dare say' 239) sinks Anne's joy. But Anne quickly thinks up a new scheme: 'if he did not come to Camden-place himself, it would be in her power to send an intelligible sentence by Captain Harville' (239). In this little story, we can see that the agent's action is chaotically formed: the intended message lurks behind the manifest meaning, and this lag opens up a gap, a space between the enunciation and enounced, between the anchoring of signifiers and communicative desire. Unless this gap collapses, the subject's action retains split references, and her deployment of tactics is both teleological and accidental. But it is noteworthy that the subject can still convey her particular wish through the contingent circumstances and the confusion of the Other's voices.

Austen's way of handling Anne Elliot and Wentworth's union expresses her faith in the deployment of this special (weak) agency and resistance. The subjects are constituted and formed by the Other, but they are not docile puppets. As each subject is capable of generating its 'particular discourse' with a differing degree of identification with class ideology, paternal custom (owing to each subject's history and organization of experience), the Otherized subject is able to question the Other. To elucidate this concept clearly, though the Other is 'I', the heterogeneous nature of the discourse system always allow different positions in respect to its reception of discourse. Lacan first highlights the fact that the ego is a system that contains 'a whole organization of certainties, beliefs, of coordinates, of references' that are structured by the Other and yet filtered by the subject's particular formation (S1 23). In that regard, while the Symbolic begins with the enforcement of paternal laws and ideological consciousness, the subject is constructed through various, conflictual discourses, with different identifications and sympathies. The subject is the effect of the ideological Other; however, it can also resist the totalizing ideology for two reasons. First, it is impossible to totalize language. Chance and personal history can

often influence 'what particular discourse configurations [to] enter into the subject'.²¹ As Judith Butler notes, this can lead to a new sense of resistant agency.

'Agency' would then be the double-movement of being constituted in and by a signifier...where 'to be constituted' means 'to be compelled to repeat or mime' the signifier itself....And yet,...the 'failure' of the signifier to produce the unity it appears to name is...the result of that term's incapacity to include the social relations that it provisionally stabilizes through a set of contingent inclusions. This incompleteness will be the result of a specific set of social exclusions that return to haunt the claims of identity.²²

In other words, as chance ('contingent inclusions') can always upset the totality of (ideological) language to haunt the subject, it can produce a new agency through the gap of the subject's 'miming' the signifier, and the failure of that signifying practice to contain a subject. Secondly, each subject (driven by its particular varying forces and emphasis: 'desire, repression, the Symbolic, the Imaginary, the Real') will produce its own unique discourse even though each receives the same discursive stimulus (e.g. the same movie will produce different responses with different people). As a result, different 'discourse combination and modification' will result in different particular discourses for each subject.²³ Alcorn tells us how this particularistic agency functions,

First, discourse brought into the self-system is often filtered and selectively internalized and personally organized as a result of unconscious functions of repression and desire attending to external discourse. Second, as different discourse systems within the subject compete to operate the subject, conflict is generated. This conflict plays a role in a multitude of discourse deflections noted by analysts in the speech of patients: substitution, fetishism, parapraxis, symptomatic associations. As these functions produce uniquely juxtaposed discourse structures, they produce original meaning effects that can have social and personal consequences (41).

In the story, Wentworth and Anne represent two Otherized subjects that *cannot* be totalized by the Other. Wentworth is in love, but his personal suffering drives him to remain unconvinced by Anne's argument, unyielding to Sir Walter's snobbish pride,

²¹ Alcorn, "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan through (and beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse*, ed. Bracher and Alcorn, 37.

²² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 220-1.

²³ Alcorn, "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan through (and beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts" 39.

or Lady Russell's officious concern. Due to the subject's history, his particular discourse drives him to remain skeptical of class values. These conflicts, indeed, help 'play a role in a multitude of discourse deflections' within the same discursive system, thereby allowing the subject to modify it with variations. At the end of the novel, Wentworth refuses to be brainwashed by the social system. His particular position certainly has social consequences, as Austen implies that Wentworth takes pleasure in correcting the misdeeds of the upper gentry class. This is symbolized by the restoration of Mrs Smith's fortune through Wentworth's liberal assistance. Equally, Anne Elliot has also nourished her idea of 'legitimate deviance' in the class discourse. With her long years of suffering at home, Anne Elliot has turned to identify with the oppressed and the marginalized instead of with the rich. Anne Elliot does not admire the pompous ways of the Dalrymples, but would rather visit Mrs Smith. This sympathy with the poor has, if not social consequences, at least personal consequences (Mrs Smith is pivotal in the revelation of Mr Elliot's character).

In *Persuasion*, Austen jokingly aligns her mature, resistant subjects with reckless, young people, for both are equally rebellious. And their marriages are equally resistant in every aspect: against parental wishes, class standard, the pressure of friendship (Lady Russell). And yet, Austen approves of it, because it bespeaks a detotalizing response which reacts neither strictly to illusory individualism nor to the Other. '[B]y perseverance to carry their point', the marriage must take place (248).

* * *

As usual, Austen's story of action ends in reconciliation. *Persuasion* emphatically foregrounds the notion of 'forgiveness'. Wentworth forgives Lady Russell and the insolence of the Elliots. In the Hegelian context, forgiveness marks the highest state of reconciliation between two different conscientious outlooks: i.e. one view suggests that valid action should originate from its own desire (which we have witnessed to be excentric), while the other view believes that action should come from pure, impersonal, abstract motives like obedience (which we have understood to be the result of a corrigiblist re-reading of the past). The Hegelian notion of 'enlightened forgiveness', according to Allen Speight, can be differentiated into at least two types. First of all, the subject learns to forgive 'errors'. It forgives another person after considering the 'fallibility' of the person or the situation. The other may

or may not intend to inflict injuries, but the subject detaches itself from its wound to look at 'the inadvertence that may be attached to an action or simply an agent's mistakenness'.²⁴ In other words, the subject forgives another person because it is capable of distancing itself, taking various facets of (fallible) action or background into consideration (ibid). Secondly, the subject can forgive the other person's 'self-interested action'. The subject does not think the other is malicious or evil, but it simply points out that the other person errs because its action springs from too much self-love/selfishness. (For example, Anne silently disagrees with Wentworth's 'innocent' acceptance of two women's attention at the same time.) However, the subject accepts the 'agent-relative reasons for an action' by forgiving/understanding the other person's motivation (121).

In *Persuasion*, neither type of forgiveness is applicable in the case of Wentworth and Anne. Most readers' first impression of *Persuasion* would either be that Wentworth has learnt to forgive Anne, or that Anne has learnt to forgive herself or Wentworth. But in fact, Austen has arranged the ending in such a way that, between Wentworth and Anne, they do not need forgiveness at all. Instead, both of them take their actions to be right. Anne believes that she is 'right' in refusing Wentworth at that time (in the final version, for the sake of 'duty'). Wentworth at first believes that he has the right to be angry. Austen emphatically tells us twice that he 'could not forgive', 'did not forgive' Anne (61, 91). However, his anger evaporates after seeing the superiority of Anne in Uppercross and Lyme. Eventually, Wentworth comes to see his past anger is perfectly groundless for Anne's decision is neither erroneous (according to Mrs Croft's words) nor is it related to self-interest (according to Anne's notion of obedience). As Austen further demolishes the superiority of an unyielding temper by foregrounding that his 'proud' refusal 'to ask again' has prolonged 'six years of suffering and separation' (247), Wentworth concludes that he 'ought to forgive every one sooner than' [himself] (247).

It is in the relationship between Lady Russell and Wentworth that Austen portrays the Hegelian idea of forgiving 'erroneous thinking'. Wentworth reconciles with Lady Russell's 'former transgressions' (251): 'there are hopes of her being forgiven in time' (247). Though he is 'not obliged to say that he believed [Lady Russell] to have

²⁴ Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* 119-120.

been right in originally dividing them', 'he was ready to say almost every thing in her favor' (251). On the other hand, Lady Russell also knows that she has misjudged Wentworth and Mr Elliot. She has subsequently 'attached herself as a mother to the man who was securing the happiness of her other child' (249). Austen tells the readers that it is a genuine, enlightened reconciliation that breaks down barriers and differences owing to *love*. For the love of Anne, Wentworth willingly undertakes a *revision* of his judgement on Lady Russell—which involves taking into account her background on the whole (other than only the transgression to himself). Hence he can 'value [her] from his heart' (251). Meanwhile, Lady Russell simply acknowledges her errors, and forgets her past dislike of Wentworth because if 'her second object was to be sensible and well-judging, her first was to see Anne happy. She loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities' (249). For Anne's sake, Lady Russell has no difficulty in acknowledging her inadvertent mistakes. 'Captain Wentworth's manners had not suited her own ideas, she had been too quick in suspecting them to indicate a character of dangerous impetuosity' (ibid). The reconciliation is 'awkward' but real.

In the reconciliatory process between Wentworth and Sir Walter, Austen foregrounds the presence of a 'cynical forgiveness' due to self-interest. The subject attempts to 'forgive' the other because, in doing so, it can prolong/enact its interest. The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the forgiving act and the lack of good will in reality, but it none the less still insists upon the mask of reconciliation for it takes into account the particular interest behind the reconciliation. Wentworth represents the way in which a nineteenth-century subject must repress the past in order to win the patriarch's approval of marriage. On the other hand, Sir Walter reconciles with the man he once despised due to simple self-interest. Captain Wentworth can be forgiven and be included among the Elliots because 'Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody' (248). Austen ironically criticizes this type of reconciliation on the grounds that it promotes neither understanding nor appreciation of the Other. Wentworth keeps no contact with Sir Walter; and Sir Walter does not understand the value of Wentworth, though he proclaims that he admires Wentworth because of his (superficial) merits: the

‘superiority of appearance’, his ‘well-sounding name’. As Anne can marry such a wealthy man, Sir Walter has the joy of keeping his money and giving only ‘a small part of the share of’ Anne’s ten thousand pounds at the moment (248). With this self-interested love in mind, Austen notes that Sir Walter finally writes down Wentworth’s name ‘with a very good grace for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honor’ (249).

Austen particularly notes that this type of (shallow) forgiveness can best preserve coldness among people. Sir Walter accepts Wentworth, but the family has no ‘graciousness and warmth’ (248) to look with favor at a man with no background (in contrast to the Elliots’ busy welcoming of their great cousin Lady Dalrymple). Austen unveils the ‘unforgiving’ nature of the class system as the father and sister refuse to welcome Wentworth enthusiastically. Wentworth is acknowledged to have risen in the class sense, but he can never be forgiven for being the brother of the former curate of Monkford, and ‘Mr Wentworth was...not a “man of property”’, and certainly not a ‘gentleman’ according to Sir Walter’s definition (23). Hence, Anne, instead of taking pride at her status, inverts the hierarchy as she senses her rich family is inferior and deficient in humanity. Austen tells us that Anne knows ‘her own inferiority’ lies in the fact that she has

no family to receive and estimate [Wentworth] properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer him in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters (251).

In the story, this shallow reconciliation cannot delude the enlightened subjects, but they are well disposed to tolerate it. The enlightened subjects cannot abandon this link for the (new) meritocratic enterprise manifests a *continuity* with the old ideological space.²⁵ In the end, Wentworth and Anne’s tolerance of the patriarch

²⁵ Hence, I agree with the critical view that Austen is not subversive in terms of breaking down class boundaries through the game of marriage. Wiltshire has made a good point.

The navy men are not an alternative class, taking over power, their entrepreneurial initiative poised to take over the leading role in society vacated by the hollow gentry: they are gentry themselves, integrated and absorbed into the existing social order, as Benwick’s eventual marriage to Louisa Musgrove exemplifies. (*Jane Austen and the Body* 158)

In the novel, the love between Anne and Wentworth is essentially an intra-class (instead of inter-class) affair. R.W. Chapman, in his ‘A Reply to Mr Duffy on *Persuasion*’ *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 9 (Sept 1954), points out that Sir Walter is not a member of the aristocracy, and that naval officers were in no sense a distinct ‘class’ for in general they came from landed families themselves. But still

represents ‘a way of registering the clear-eyed recognition of the defects of the world that is compatible with full acceptance’.²⁶ The enlightened consciousness ‘leads to the loss of naivete’, hence these subjects can see that the old regime is ‘defensive’, and is related to ‘narrow-mindedness, which is intent on remaining as it is’.²⁷ However, the newly rich subjects—after struggling with an equally ruthless, warring, snobbish hierarchy in the army or the navy (‘admirals’, ‘captains’, ‘lieutenants’)—are well equipped to handle the patriarch’s snobbish notion of hierarchy. And they also aspire to be absorbed into the existing gentry class structure. Hence, instead of seeing Anne being converted by romance, or there being an unconquerable antagonism between Wentworth and the Elliots/Dalrymples’ culture, we might as well conclude that neither is true. Anne and Wentworth return to a ‘safe’ notion of class marriage by uniting moral laws, self interests, romantic love, with a sound financial package. Meanwhile, the boundary between ancestry and the new risen groups are fast disappearing through marriage and the conferment of titles, even though the old regime tries to keep highlighting their pure lineage. In this cooperation-resistance of old and new influences, Austen’s story mirrors a new, delicate, dynamic agency as modern subjects can simultaneously live in the corrupt world, absorb or enjoy distorted values, and yet disidentify with them and transform them in subtle ways. It denotes not an ‘Agency’ in its revolutionary, intentional, autonomous sense; however, in numerous small ways, these ‘illusionless’ subjects can—in spite of their enjoyment of class benefits, their ‘participation in a collective, realistically attuned way of seeing things’²⁸—go beyond the impasse of misrecognition to re-read their histories and change some people’s lives. With repeated (retrospective) readings of the past, Austen implies that these subjects may lead to a new cognition towards the future.

what is new in the novel is that Austen has pinpointed new developments in the intra-class system. (154) As Moler says, ‘The point Jane Austen apparently stresses is that Wentworth and his circle are self-made men who have risen from comparative poverty through their own efforts, while the Elliots and their friends are proud of resting on their ancestors’ laurels’ (*Jane Austen and the Art of Illusion* 190).

²⁶ Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Philosophy. The Project of Reconciliation* 91.

²⁷ Sloterdijk *Critique of Cynical Reason* 59.

²⁸ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* 5.

Conclusion

Austen's faith in the enlightenment ideal has led her to coincide with Hegel's positive view of the modern social world: a world in which individuals can 'attain reconciliation', 'find satisfaction in their participation in the family, civil society, and state'.¹ Austen's novelistic discourses are notably dominated by a love of enlightened recognition: after some serious reflection, her subjects usually attain a new understanding of the self, and turn away from their past misrecognition. At this stage, the subject's 'cognitive agency' is to problematize the autonomous, organic, unitary notion of Selfhood (NA, SS, PP, E). The subject is revealed to be constructed by gothic, or romantic language (NA, SS). The subject is not as independent as it thinks, and it realizes the value of the Other in its understanding of reality, or identity (PP, E, P). By relinquishing an (illusory) egoistic unity, the subject undergoes the (Othering) process of *Bildung* and returns to a harmonious recognition of the Other-in-me.

Austen's negative vision soon pushes her to question the idea of 'unity' or 'Absolute reconciliation'. Her subjects, though enlightened, are still suffering in the family, the civil society and in the state. There remains a genuine *lack* of harmony, of love, of unity at social, class or personal level. In this light, the subject's task is to generate its 'analytical agency' to question the discourse of the master, which buttresses the 'harmonious' but oppressive practices in these spheres of life. The subject is pushed to examine how its understanding is guided by the master, how irrational the master's 'ideal' can be, and how the subject yields to the master to constitute its being (NA, SS, E). The marginalized subject or the servant comes to distrust the master discourse, or its authoritarian style of governance (PP, MP, P). Eventually, the subject's pain or marginalized *jouissance* will empower the subject to modify the existing master discourse, and create a less oppressive discursive practice. In her stories, Austen always puts her hopes on these intelligent, once-oppressed subjects to enact the possibility of social change. They no longer possess the strong, revolutionary, (pseudo)autonomous agency of the master. These subjects understand their 'lack': they are constituted by and subject to the laws of the patriarch, the Other or language; however, they can go beyond a total subjection to

the Other. *Persuasion* illustrates Austen's new understanding of the 'double movement' of this new agency: the subject is constituted by language, the Other and the constraints of the environment, but the subject can also turn these factors for its own use. And language, environment or the Other fails to produce the totalizing power to contain the agentic subject.

In the end, Austen intends that all her enlightened subjects should go back to society and enjoy prosperity. In the 'tell-tale compression of the pages' (NA 250), Austen celebrates the triumph of ideological fantasy and the return of misrecognition even though all her subjects are disillusioned enough to disidentify with the 'enlightened', reconciliatory gestures of the society. Lured by ideological comforts, the Austenian subjects cynically practice a subversive reason without much subversion—as they quickly turn to a good-willed participation in reality. In Lacan's words, they choose to live with a 'systematic' (mis)understanding of reality. Cynical misrecognition 'is not ignorance' for 'it cannot be conceived without correlate knowledge'. It 'represents a certain organization of affirmations and negations, to which the subject is attached' (S1 167). Such is Austen's complex enlightenment vision, which helps define her 'dialectics of misrecognition' and which defies any simplistic account of Austen as a conservative or subversive writer. In contrast to the optimistic belief that 'social freedom' is dependent on enlightened thought, Austen's novels exemplify the way in which cynicism is an 'enlightened false consciousness' that questions, tolerates, or even justifies social unfreedom—as modern subjects are enlightened enough to realize injustice, but not reflective enough to abandon ideological, vested interests. In addition, the imperative voice from the enlightenment project also urges the subject to rationally 'accept and obey the customs and laws of the country into which [it was] born without questioning their authority' (SO 80). With a pretended non-knowledge, a false love of the Other, a cynical forgiveness, or a determined resistance to know how oppressive the world can be, Austen's subjects never probe reality enough to reject it, and these enlightened subjects are often 'afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestablished relations' which they once may have found dubious.²

¹ Hardimon *Hegel's Social Philosophy* 81.

² Sloterdijk *Critique of Cynical Reason* 6.

In the final analysis, Austen's dialectics of misrecognition do not point towards docile conformism or subversive changes, but towards a struggle between on-going analytical recognition in the midst of persisting misrecognition. It calls for a constant 're-sensitizing agency' as her subjects inwardly carry on the struggle between the love of critique and the love of comforts. They favor survival and a good-willed participation in the patriarchal gentry world; however, many Austenian subjects remain distinctively sensitive to past oppression, or the pain of compromise with the patriarchs (e.g. Henry Tilney, Edward Ferrars, Elinor Dashwood, Colonel Brandon, Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price, Anne Elliot, Frederick Wentworth). They privately uphold a particular discourse that is 'inspired' by a '*No* to the world of fathers, legislators and profiteers'—even though it is a discursive 'criticism with limited liability' as they stand at the junction of new ambitions and old wounds.³ Between the irreversible awareness of the corrupt reality and the love of prosperous self-preservation, Austen's stories invoke a world in which the subjects *can* have a knowledge that can no longer be co-opted by misrecognition ('I know what I am doing, but I pretend to not know and I am nevertheless doing it'). This re-cognition prevents the subject from desensitizing itself or getting 'used to the given order of things'.⁴ In turn, though the Austenian cynical subjects conform with and are well integrated in the social structure, they can also appear as enlightened lone owls, or provocative, stubborn, distance-creating mockers.

³ *ibid* xxxv, xxxvi.

⁴ *ibid* xxxiv.

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